Hafa Adai!

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Saipan Tribune

THE CNMI'S DAILY N

6 DAYS BEFORE CHRISTMAS

20 new US citizens sworn in during CNMI Constitution Day. PAGE 2

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Heavenly Pangelinan shares her Miss Earth 2024 journey

By RACQUEL H. FLOYD
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CORRESPONDENT

Despite not taking home the title and winning any special awards, participating in the Miss Earth 2024 was an unforgettable and inspiring experience for 2024 Miss Northern Marianas Earth Heavenly Divine Aldan Pangelinan as it was her first time to travel alone in a foreign country.

"My experience participating in Miss Earth 2024 was so humbling, surreal, and inspiring. It was my first time traveling alone to a foreign country with no family there,"

See MISS EARTH on Page 4

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Miss Northern Marianas Earth 2024 Heavenly Divine Aldan Pangelinan, fifth from left, poses with other contestants at a school conference teaching children about sustainable living.

Over 4 years in jail for meth smuggler

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The U.S. District Court for the NMI slapped an over four-year sentence on a man who attempted to smuggle over $150,000 worth of methamphetamine or "ice" into the CNMI through a portable speaker.

Yesterday, U.S. District Court for the NMI Chief Judge Ramona V. Manglona ruled in favor of the proposal made by the defense counsel of Xuguang Li, a man who pleaded guilty to attempted possession of a controlled substance with the intent to distribute for attempting to smuggle over $150,000 worth of

See SMUGGLER on Page 4

Camacho

Former representative Camacho passes away

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
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REPORTER

Former CNMI representative George N. Camacho passed away earlier this week, but local officials are in agreement that his dedication to the Commonwealth will forever be remembered.

Gov. Arnold I. Palacios and Lt. Gov. David M. Apatang released a statement that honored the life and legacy of Camacho, a

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TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE RISKS

GAO: US gov't provided $1.9B to US territories, countries in Pacific region

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
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CORRESPONDENT

» **CNMI receives 3rd highest at $150.2M in federal awards**

The CNMI received $150.2 million out of $1.9 billion that the U.S. government provided to U.S. territories in the Pacific and countries in the Indo-Pacific to address climate risks from fiscal years 2017 through 2023.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office in their report issued last week found that 12 U.S. federal agencies provided the funding, across 477 activities, to address climate risks in Bangladesh, the Maldives, 14

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INSIDE

BUSINESS

Guam Business Magazine is pleased to announce the nominees for the 2024 Guam Business Magazine Executive of the Year.

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WORLD

A senior Russian general was killed Tuesday by a bomb hidden in a scooter outside his apartment building in Moscow, a day after Ukraine's security service leveled criminal charges against him.

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LIFE & STYLE

The Selena Gomez ballad "Mi Camino," the Will Ferrell and Harper Steele road trip documentary "Will & Harper" and Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross's pulsating "Challengers" score are one step closer to an Oscar nomination.

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Local

20 new US citizens sworn in during CNMI Constitution

On Dec. 16, 2024, the U.S. District Court for the Northern Mariana Islands held a naturalization ceremony where 29 candidates from four countries were granted their applications for naturalization and were officially welcomed as the country's newest U.S. citizens. The event was presided over by Chief Judge Ramona V. Manglona and took place at the United States Courthouse on Saipan, attended by family, friends, and court officials.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Twenty new U.S. citizens pose for a photo after their naturalization ceremony last Monday at the U.S. District Court for the Northern Mariana Islands.

In celebration of CNMI Constitution Day, former governor Benigno R. Fitial served as the distinguished guest speaker at the ceremony, sharing inspiring remarks that highlighted the importance of U.S. citizenship and the history of the CNMI leaders' efforts to ensure the naturalization of residents born in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

In his speech, Fitial reflected on a pivotal piece of legislation from his time in office as a representative. He recalled the introduction of House Bill 14-97, which he co-sponsored during his tenure as speaker of the 14th CNMI Legislature. This legislation was enacted into law on May 27, 2004, and it allowed for the naturalization of residents born in the CNMI, addressing the issue of stateless children born to non-citizen parents, many of whom were contract workers in the CNMI.

"More than 20 years ago, there were over 300 stateless children born to non-citizen parents in the CNMI," Fitial said. "These individuals were born on U.S. soil but lacked a place to call home due to their parents' non-resident status. It did not seem right that they should be denied citizenship. Every individual deserves to be naturalized by the land of their birth, regardless of their parents' status."

The former governor also praised the support of individuals like Danny Buniag and the NMI Filipino Association, who helped him meet with U.S. Justice Department officials in Washington, D.C., to secure assistance for more than 300 stateless CNMI-born individuals to become U.S. citizens. His advocacy ultimately contributed to a historic change in the lives of many. Fitial concluded his speech by extending heartfelt congratulations to the new citizens. "Welcome home," he said, sharing in the pride and joy of the newly naturalized individuals.

The ceremony was a momentous occasion for the twenty applicants who hailed from Bangladesh, Czech Republic, Philippines, and Russia, and who took the oath of allegiance in front of their loved ones and court officials, affirming their commitment to the United States. The youngest of the group is 36 years old, with the oldest at 76 years old. Another applicant, Jimmy Tindoc, was recognized as the longest resident of the CNMI prior to becoming a U.S. citizen having arrived in 1983. This group brings the total number of naturalized citizens for the year to 213.

The new citizens are Wrene May De Sagun Alegre, Ray Aldus Sadian Alejandre, Janet Padernal Babauta, Arvin Quito Bacani, Rodylyn Morales Bacani, Khodeza Begum, Jane Anne Gonzales Craney, Sarka Glajchova, Martin Jambor, Virginia Francisco Kintz, Wilfredo Rusit Labadan, Christopher Rufin Lilles, Evelyn and Enrico Lopez, Ronaldo Caparas Lopez, Faith Carla Abais Mitchell, Desolie Siganay Ribut, Marlou Aranda Salamat, Emily Sabangan Santos, Jimmy Reyes Tindoc, and Anna Yushkova. ***(PR)***

DPS announces DUI checkpoints to ensure holiday safety

By CHRYSTAL MARINO
chrystal_marino@saipantribune.com
CORRESPONDENT

As the holiday season unfolds, the Department of Public Safety is ramping up efforts to keep roads safe by implementing a series of DUI sobriety checkpoints. These operations aim to deter impaired driving, promote public safety, and raise awareness about the risks associated with driving under the influence.

According to DPS' press release yesterday, the checkpoints will take place across multiple locations on Saipan, targeting high-traffic areas during peak hours:

- Wednesday, Dec. 18: Chalan Monsignor Guerrero (7:30pm- 9:30pm).
- Friday, Dec. 20: Chalan Monsignor Guerrero from San Jose to Dan Dan (7pm-9pm) and Beach Road from Illiyan to Garapan (9pm-11:30pm).
- Saturday, Dec. 21: Chalan Pale Arnold from Puerto Rico to Navy Hill (7pm-9pm). Simultaneous setups at Beach Road from San Jose to Chalan Kanoa and Beach Road from Chalan Laulau to Garapan (both from 9pm-11:30pm).

The checkpoints are part of a larger initiative that includes high-visibility enforcement, saturation patrols, and speed enforcement at random locations around the island. These measures aim to detect and apprehend drivers impaired by alcohol, drugs, or medication while emphasizing the importance of staying sober behind the wheel.

DPS also extends holiday greetings to the community, urging residents and visitors to enjoy the festive season responsibly.

For more information about the checkpoints and road safety tips, contact the DPS Highway Patrol Division at (670) 664-9000.

Nominate a K–12 STEM Teacher
for the Presidential Awards for Excellence
in Mathematics and Science Teaching

"I am honored to represent the many exceptional teachers in mathematics. I believe this award promotes the teaching profession and encourages our best and brightest to consider this career."

—Dora Miura, 2015 Northern Mariana Islands Mathematics Awardee

"[This award] is the culmination of my educational journey, starting as a student learning from passionate teachers, and now as a professional helping students develop their own academic appetites. I am honored and humbled to be a part of such a prestigious group of educators, which would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of my family, friends, and teachers along the way."

—Peter Loken, 2016 Northern Mariana Islands Science Awardee

The Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST) are the top honors bestowed by the U.S. Government to K–12 STEM teachers. Each year, up to 110 outstanding educators from across the country are recognized by the White House for their passion, dedication, and impact in the classroom.

Do you know a deserving STEM teacher? Nominate them at www.paemst.nsf.gov/SaipanTribune.

NMC-CREES' NextGen Scholarship awards 73 total STEM scholarships

In keeping with the NextGen Program's proactive approach to ensuring educated Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics students earn their degrees, the program has officially awarded 73 students scholarships from the associate to doctorate degree levels.

As a result of the NextGen Scholarship, which garnered over 100 applications, a total of 73 students were awarded. Of those selected, the Scholarship will support 62 undergraduate degrees, six master's degrees, and five doctoral degrees. The students are awarded as a way to support learners pursuing degree programs in food science, agriculture, natural resource management, agritourism, and related fields.

Funded through the USDA NIFA NextGen Workforce Initiative, NextGen CNMI's primary focus is Agritourism: Regenerative Workforce for African-American and Insular Communities. The NextGen Scholarship was first announced in November 2023, with its primary initiative set on inspiring current college students to pursue STEM degrees in an effort to bridge the gap between agriculture and education. Alongside receiving financial support, students were also provided with counseling support, access to summer academies, internships, and mentorship opportunities through USDA and MANRRS National Chapters and the MANRRS-NMC Chapter.

To qualify for the scholarship, students must already be accepted into an eligible undergraduate or graduate degree program at an accredited institution and a US citizen and CNMI resident, or permanent resident. In addition, students must have an initial GPA of at least 2.5, while expecting a GPA of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale to be eligible for renewal.

Awarded students are enrolled at over 30 institutions across the US, including Northern Marianas College, Stanford University, Washington State University, Portland State University, the University of Hawaii System, Chaminade University, Purdue University, University of Wisconsin Madison, University of New England, and various others. Of the students selected, 51 are enrolled in public institutions, with the remaining 22 enrolled in private institutions.

"The scholarship program offers major benefits. Firstly, it directly addresses the skills gap in these vital sectors, ensuring a steady pipeline of qualified professionals. As the global population grows, the demand for innovative agricultural practices, sustainable resource management, and effective food systems becomes increasingly urgent. Scholarships can attract talented individuals to these fields, fostering expertise essential for tackling contemporary challenges such as climate change, food security, and environmental sustainability," stated Dr. Sarker, NextGEN Project director, professor, and NMI program leader for Food Science.

Sarker continues, "Moreover, these scholarships can promote diversity and inclusivity within the workforce. By targeting underrepresented groups, such as women and minorities, the program can help create a more equitable landscape in agricultural and natural resource professions. This diversity not only enriches the workforce but also leads to more innovative solutions, as varied perspectives contribute to problem-solving and decision-making processes."

"I am truly grateful for the NMC NextGen Scholarship. It has enabled me to continue pursuing my degree, especially during my last semester at the University of Hawaii at Hilo. Thanks to this scholarship, I will be able to complete my Bachelor's in Marine Science by the end of this year without the stress of financial burdens associated with tuition and fees," shared scholarship recipient Laurina Sebaklim.

"The NMC NextGen Scholarship Program is an incredible opportunity that I am so blessed to have received. It is an opportunity to achieve my academic goals without the worry of whether I worked enough and saved enough for the next semester. I'm able to take some time for myself, fully participate and be present in my courses, and have the time to create networks and relationships on and off campus. It is also an opportunity to be a part of a community of scholars from the CNMI, to have other scholars to lean on and support as well! Thank you NextGen!" shared another student.

Patty Coleman, interim dean of NMC-CREES stated, "Dr. Zaidul Sarker and co-project director Dr. Yunzi Zhang endeavored to provide scholarships for 27 CNMI residents through NextGen.

Thanks to the collective efforts of the NextGen team, we've significantly exceeded that target by awarding 73 scholarships to our CNMI residents."

With this pivotal investment in education and workforce development, the NextGen scholarship holds the potential to drive innovation and sustainability in the CNMI and beyond. By providing financial support and mentorship, the next generation of leaders are being nurtured to shape the future of agriculture, food science, and natural resource management in the CNMI. ***(PR)***

PROCUREMENT AND SUPPLY
COMMONWEALTH HEALTHCARE CORPORATION

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP)
RFP25-CHCC/CGC-002

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: JANUARY 13TH, 2025 TIME: 10:00AM (CHST)

"TINIAN OFFICE LEASE"

INTERESTED PARTIES CAN DOWNLOAD THIS **REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL** FROM THE CHCC WEBSITE [WWW.CHCC.HEALTH]. ONCE AT THE SITE, NAVIGATE TO REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS TAB ON THE LEFT NAVIGATION BAR. CLICK ON THE URL FOR THIS RFP. YOU WILL BE REQUIRED TO ENTER DATA TO ALLOW US TO TRACK ALL REQUESTS FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY.

THE CHCC RESERVES THE RIGHT TO REJECT ANY AND ALL PROPOSAL AND TO WAIVE ANY IMPERFECTIONS IN ANY PROPOSAL, IF TO DO SO SHALL BE IN THE INTEREST OF THE CHCC. ALL PROPOSALS SHALL BECOME THE EXCLUSIVE PROPERTY OF THE COMMONWEALTH HEALTHCARE CORPORATION.

/S/ ESTHER L. MUNA
CHCC CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

/S/ CORA P. AOA
DIRECTOR OF PROCUREMENT & SUPPLY

COMMONWEALTH UTILITIES CORPORATION
Office of the Executive Director

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
CUC-RFP-25-010
FINANCIAL AND COMPLIANCE AUDIT FOR FISCAL YEAR ENDING SEPTEMBER 30, 2025, 2026 & 2027

The Office of the Executive Director, Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC) requires the services of a U.S. Certified Public Accounting Firm/Individual with knowledge, skill, and experience in auditing (1) financial statements in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles and auditing standards of the U.S. and; (2) federal awards programs in accordance with the Single Audit Act and U.S. Office of Management and Budget requisites

- Provide assistance to the CUC management with the preparation of the annual financial statements in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America
- Ensure that the financial statements and auditor's reports also meet any specific requirements contained in agreements or other contractual requirements relative to financial statement presentation and the audits.
- Submit the draft financial statements and accompanying auditor's reports to CUC management no later than January 31st of each year, and issue the final reports no later than February 28th of each year.
- Provide 15 bound copies of the final financial statements and accompanying auditor's report
- Provide an electronic copy (e.g., .pdf format) of the final report to the CUC.

Auditors are responsible to review the 2025, 2026 & 2027 financial statements to include the physical CUC assets for each fiscal year.

The RFP package may be obtained from the CUC Procurement and Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, Saipan, between 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on government observed holidays upon completion of registration and presentation of a receipt evidencing a non-refundable payment to the CUC Treasury Section, by cash, check or credit card in the amount of $100.00 for one RFP package set.

One (1) original and five (5) hard copies, along with an electronic copy of the proposal on a compact disk in PDF format must be submitted in a sealed envelope marked ***"CUC-RFP-25-010, Financial and Compliance Audit for Fiscal Year Ending September 30, 2025, 2026 & 2027"*** to the CUC Procurement & Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, P.O. Box 501220, Saipan, MP 96950, no later than **January 10, 2025 at 10:00 AM** (ChST). Submissions, in PDF, must also be emailed to the addresses as noted in the RFP. Late submissions and conditional proposals will not be considered.

Discussions may be conducted with responsible offerors who submit proposals determined to be reasonably susceptible of being selected for award for the purpose of clarification and to ensure full understanding of and responsiveness to solicitation requirements. Offerors shall be accorded fair and equal treatment with respect to any opportunity to discussion and revision of proposals, and such revision may be permitted after submission and prior to award for the purpose of obtaining the best and final offers. During discussions, there will be no disclosure of any information derived from proposals submitted by competing offerors.

All Offeror are advised that CUC assumes no responsibility in any act of omission on the part of the Offeror due to lack of information or understanding of the proposal requirements in the course of Contractor's preparation of a proposal or supply under the contract. The RFP does not commit CUC to award a contract, to pay any cost incurred in the preparation of the proposal under this request, or to procure or contract for services. Offeror are required to comply with all CNMI and applicable Federal Laws. This bid and the ensuing contract shall be executed as per the CUC Procurement Regulations.

Questions or requests for clarification will be entertained only from pre-registered prospective proposers and must be submitted in writing no later than **10:00 AM (ChST) on December 20, 2024** to Manny B. Sablan, CUC Purchasing Administrator, via email address manny.sablan@cucgov.org with a copy to Betty G. Terlaje, CUC Chief Financial Officer, via email address betty.terlaje@cucgov.org,, Rodolfo Urbano, CUC Chief Accountant via email, rodolfo.urbano@cucgov.org and Marcela Tenorio, via email address, marcela.tenorio@cucgov.org.

CUC reserves the right to reject any or all proposals for any reason and to waive any defects in said proposal, if in its sole opinion, to do so would be in the best interest of CUC. All proposals shall become the property of CUC.

KEVIN O. WATSON
Executive Director

MANNY B. SABLAN
Purchasing Administrator

IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

In Re the Matter of the Petition for Appointment of General Guardianship for:	]	FCD-GU CIVIL ACTION NO. 24-0492
J.J.A. Minor Child(ren)	]	**NOTICE OF HEARING**
By:	]	
Benjamin Guiao and Felina Guiao Petitioner(s)	]	

Notice is hereby given that the above-entitled matter is set for a hearing on February 3, 2025 at 9:00 a.m. in Courtroom 217A before Associate Judge Teresa Kim-Tenorio.

Dated this 11th day of December, 2024.

Patrick V. Diaz
Clerk of Court

/s/ _____
By: Deputy Clerk of Court

DIVISION OF PROCUREMENT SERVICES
CNMI GOVERNMENT
REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

RFP NO.: RFP25-BECQ/DEQ-42500025

SUBMISSION DATE: JANUARY 21, 2025
TIME: 9:00 A.M.

"TO PROVIDE FACILITATION AND LOGISTICAL COORDINATION FOR THE BIENNIAL PACIFIC ISLANDS ENVIRONMENT CONFERENCE AND PACIFIC ISLANDS ENVIRONMENT DIRECTOR'S MEETING"

COPIES OF THE SPECIFICATIONS MAY BE OBTAINED ON THE MUNIS VENDOR ACCESS PORTAL (https://selfservice.dof.gov.mp/vss/) OR AT THE OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF PROCUREMENT SERVICES, LOCATED AT BLDG. NO. 12386 ASCENSION DRIVE, CAPITOL HILL, SAIPAN, DURING REGULAR WORKING HOURS.

QUESTIONS REGARDING THIS RFP CAN BE MADE TO MR. JUSTIN PANGELINAN, CLEAN AIR PROGRAM MANAGER AT justin.pangelinan@becq.gov.mp BY JANUARY 09, 2025, BY 4:30 P.M, ChST.

THE PROVISIONS OF THE CNMI PROCUREMENT REGULATIONS, NMIAC SECTION 70-30.3-725 AND 70-30.3-730 PROHIBITING GRATUITIES, KICKBACKS AND CONTINGENT FEES SHALL APPLY.

THE CNMI GOVERNMENT RESERVES THE RIGHT TO REJECT ANY OR ALL BIDS, OR PORTIONS THEREOF, AND WAIVE IMMATERIAL DEFECTS IF TO DO SO WOULD BE IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE CNMI GOVERNMENT.

/S/ FLOYD MASGA
ACTING ADMINISTRATOR, BECQ

/S/ BRIEN S. NICHOLAS JR.
ACTING DIRECTOR, PS

Tudela steps down as CPA executive director

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

After just a little over a year since being chosen to serve as the Commonwealth Ports Authority's managing director, Leo Tudela will officially be stepping down from his post.

Tudela

Tudela, who joined the CPA as its new executive director back in November 2023, has officially resigned. His resignation takes effect this Friday, Dec. 20.

Tudela, who tendered his resignation to the board last month, will be following in the footsteps of former CPA board chair Joe Ayuyu (who resigned just a few weeks prior).

Currently, Frederick A. Pangelinan has been appointed acting executive director since Tudela gave his 30-day notice.

Tudela's resignation will be discussed during CPA's board meeting today, Dec. 19.

Tudela is a retired U.S. Army veteran who earned a degree in sociology with a minor in business administration from California State University, followed by graduate studies in public administration.

Tudela also completed a Senior Executive International Business Program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Tudela then joined the U.S. Postal Service in 1967 where he climbed the ropes and made it to the position of area manager in the early 1990s, overseeing operations, policy, and customer service for 97,000 employees in Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi.

Before retiring back in 2018, Tudela was the U.S. Postal Service director for Asia-Pacific global business. He was based in Washington, D.C. and was also the postal ambassador to the Freely Associated States.

SMUGGLER

From page 1

methamphetamine into the CNMI through a portable speaker, and sentenced him to a 51-month imprisonment term or four years and two months.

Li is represented by attorney Bruce Berline.

In addition to sentencing, Manglona also gave Li credit for time served of 164 days.

After serving his sentence, Li will be placed on supervised release for a duration of three years.

Before remanding him back to the custody of the United States Marshal Service, Manglona told Li that she hopes he can return home to his family and face them to explain his crimes firsthand.

Li is on a fugitive detainer under Immigration and Customs Enforcement. This essentially means he will soon be under the custody of ICE and will be removable from the CNMI.

According to the criminal complaint against Li, on July 5, 2024, while conducting a routine inspection of consolidated cargo for United Parcel Service at Micronesian Air Cargo Services at the Francisco C. Ada/Saipan International Airport, CNMI Customs officers inspected a brown box addressed to Li from Ruki Zhen of Monterey Park, California.

Inside were three Beauty Yoyo brand short pants and one Burgani brand portable speaker. When the box was subjected to x-ray examination at the airport, an anomaly was detected within the speaker.

Customs officers opened the speaker and observed that it was filled with aluminum foil. The box was then brought to the Customs Contraband Enforcement Team office for further inspection. Customs officers removed six aluminum foil wrappings, which, after being unwrapped, revealed six clear plastic packets containing a crystal-like substance. Field tests performed on the substances indicated the presence of methamphetamine.

The total weight of the foil, clear plastic packets, and the crystal-like substances was approximately 516.7 gross grams.

According to CNMI Customs & Biosecurity, the total street value of the intercepted methamphetamine was $155,000.

GAO

From page 1

Pacific island countries, and three U.S. territories in the Pacific. Latesha Love-Grayer, who is the director of GAO International Affairs and Trade, issued the report and submitted it to the appropriate congressional committees and the secretaries of the departments, and other officials of some federal agencies.

According to Delegate Gregorio Kilili C. Sablan (D-MP), the GAO report, which he requested with fellow members of U.S. Congress, highlighted the $150 million in federal funding allocated for climate projects in the Marianas.

Sablan said in his *e-kilili* newsletter over the weekend that while efforts like renewable energy projects and ecosystem restoration were noted, gaps in performance tracking and collaboration among agencies were identified as challenges.

The delegate said ultimately, GAO recommended improving funding transparency to enhance climate resilience activities in the Indo-Pacific.

In terms of award value for single-country and U.S. territory climate-related activities of selected countries and U.S. territories in the Indo-Pacific Region, the CNMI received the third highest—$150,253,523—out of $1,001,159,250.

Bangladesh received the highest at $381.7 million, and Guam at second with $175.9 million. Papua New Guinea got $95.7 million, American Samoa $84.8 million, Micronesia $41.4 million, Maldives $38.6 million, Solomon Islands $29.5 million, Fiji $1.5 million, Tonga $1.5 million, and Palau $299,994. GAO made seven recommendations, including to improve efforts to track funding data and to address factors affecting climate activities to the departments of the Interior and State, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the U.S. Trade and Development Agency. Agencies concurred with all GAO recommendations.

The U.S. federal agencies that provided the fundings are the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Energy, Homeland Security, the Interior, State, and Transportation; U.S. Environmental Protection Agencies; the Millennium Challenge Corporation; USAID; and the USTDA.

GAO said while agencies can identify which countries received funding for activities implemented in a single country or U.S. territory in the Indo-Pacific region, State and USTDA could not identify how much funding they provided to the different countries associated with multi-country activities.

The count of single and multi-country activities is based on the actual list of countries and U.S. territories where the activity had been implemented at the time of GAO's review.

GAO said according to these agencies, they are unable to track data on award amount by country because they are generally not required to do so, or activities are budgeted for the entire activity rather than a specific country. From fiscal years 2017 through 2023, the State provided $104.3 million in multi-country activities and USTDA provided $1.9 million.

Countries and U.S. territories in the Indo-Pacific region are reportedly among the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, such as sea level rise, coral reef bleaching, and drought.

GAO made the report after it was asked to review federal agencies' assistance to address climate risks to countries and U.S. territories in the region.

The Inflation Reduction Act also asked GAO to oversee the use of these funds.

The GAO report examines the assistance federal agencies have provided to selected countries and U.S. territories in the Indo-Pacific.

The report also examines the extent to which selected agencies have practices to monitor the performance of such assistance in selected locations, and any challenges affecting the provision and use of such assistance and agency efforts to address them.

The challenges that GAO found include the capacity and resource constraints; limited collaboration among federal agencies, U.S. territories, or the community and public; limited information such as data technology, or data tools; and limitations in some funding instruments that provide certain types of assistance but may preclude others.

MISS EARTH

From page 1

said Pangelinan in an interview.

The Miss Earth 2024 was held in Okada Manila, Philippines last Nov. 9. Pangelinan was named the new Miss Northern Marianas Earth just a few months prior last Sept. 5.

Pangelinan, an 18-year-old from Kagman and sophomore student at Western Governors University majoring in Business Administration Management, succeeded 2023 Miss Earth Northern Marianas Jan Zowie Cruz.

She mentioned as she talked about her experience that she learned that hospitality is not physical gestures but the way you make a person feel.

All the candidates would wake up at 3am to get ready and get on the bus to leave the hotel by 6am, going to different parts of Manila to interact with the community at schools, restaurants, and even homeless shelters. At each one of these visits, all of the candidates were welcomed with kindness and gratitude.

According to Pangelinan, the most memorable, which is one of the highlights was a motorcade in Cebu, where decorated trucks paraded through the streets as villagers cheered that symbolized warm welcome.

"My most memorable experience in the pageant was the motorcade hosted for us in Kandaya Resort in Cebu. Decorated trucks for each of the candidates to ride in and toured us all over Daan Bantayan where all of the people in the village stood out on the road, waving and clapping for us. It was surreal and I have never experienced so much praise and excitement from a crowd like that."

The challenge that she faced was missing some opportunities available to other candidates due to fewer sponsors and resources. Countries with more support were prioritized for certain activities, while smaller regions had less representation.

"A challenge that I encountered was not having some of the opportunities that the other candidates had to some of the external activities (photo shoots, extended trips to other parts of the Philippines, media interviews), and fans were invited opposed to the minorities. But it's understandable when keeping a business thriving, you have to choose the majority that can offer more support... They usually invite the girls that have more sponsorships and that are able to bring more views like USA, Brazil, India, Nigeria, etc. Since we are small island, I'm not able to provide more fan support and sponsorships."

Despite the challenges, she received immense encouragement from her family, CNMI, and the organization (Exquisite Productions Marianas, Inc.), which motivated her to use what she learned about environmental protection to help preserve our island's beauty.

"I received so much support and encouragement from the CNMI, the organization and my family. In fact, when I was learning about new ways to protect our environment, I was most excited to bring back what I learned so that I can use it and do everything in my power to preserve our island and its beauty."

Furthermore, Pangelinan said that to support the pageant, the CNMI could start looking at the Miss Earth Northern Marianas organization as a valuable resource for environmental advocacy within the community, rather than just a beauty pageant.

Her plans after the pageant involve continuing her advocacy for recycling and developing projects that include sensory activities for people with disabilities, enhancing their understanding and appreciation of nature.

A longer version of this story is available at www. saipantribune.com

FORMER

From page 1

dedicated public servant and advocate for the people of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, who passed away last Dec. 16.

"Mr. Camacho's career in public service and community leadership has left a lasting impact on the CNMI. Before his appointment as director of the Criminal Justice Planning Agency, Mr. Camacho served as a legislative assistant in the CNMI Legislature's Legislative Bureau and spent seven years as a distinguished member of the CNMI House of Representatives. As CJPA director, he prioritized strengthening agency operations to ensure federal grants and programs effectively served the community. Beyond his professional achievements, he was dedicated to youth development through his work with the Natibu Sports Association and as a coach in Saipan's Little League program. Mr. Camacho's legacy of service, humility, and leadership will continue to inspire the people of the CNMI. We extend our deepest condolences to his family, friends, and loved ones during this time," said the CNMI administration.

House Speaker Edmund Villagomez (Ind-Saipan) also extends his condolences and prayers to the family of his former colleague.

"I have had the honor and privilege of serving with him in a couple of terms. We first got elected into office in the 17th Legislature. He was the Floor Leader. He served the CNMI well not only in the Legislature but also in different capacities in other organizations in the community. He will be missed," he said.

Meanwhile, Senate President Edith DeLeon Guerrero (D-Saipan) recalls the kindness and humbleness Camacho showed while he was still alive.

"The passing of our former congressman George Camacho is another sad day for the CNMI. I can always recall our former congressman as being kind and humble. I extend my deepest condolences to the family. May they find comfort and strength in our Lord and for our congressman to heavenly rest in peace," she said.

Aside from CNMI leaders, the Commonwealth Library Council and Joeten-Kiyu Public Library also issued a statement regarding the passing of Camacho who also served as the Commonwealth library council's former chairman and secretary.

A longer version of this story is available at www. saipantribune.com

JKPL celebrates 33rd anniversary: December calendar of events

December is a time for giving, and this December, we humbly invite you to the Joeten-Kiyu Public Library for a glorious anniversary celebration! Join us in celebrating and taking part in the 33rd anniversary of your favorite public library—the Joeten-Kiyu Public Library! From Dec. 17 to 28, 2024, we have fun-filled activities, events, and special gifts for patrons.

From Dec. 17 to 28, 2024, during library hours of operation, there will be a Book Mending Demonstration for the public. We will showcase tips and techniques on repairing books to the public. If you have any books that need repairing come on by and check out our Book Mending Demonstration. You are also welcome to drop by the Children's Library to do a plethora of children's Christmas crafts during this time.

On Dec. 18 to 27, 2024, we will be having a Free Library Card Replacement Day Special. Criteria for Free Library Card Replacement Day are as follows: Only patrons who have a library record with no existing fines/late fees can avail to a free library card replacement. Patrons will need to bring their I.D. (driver's license, mayor's I.D., or passport), and provide any proof of mail with your name and address.

On Dec. 19 and 28, 2024, we will be having an Amnesty Day Special! Criteria for Amnesty Day are as follows: Patrons who return overdue/lost library items on Dec. 19 and 28 and are still in good condition will have their fines/late fees waived. Please, avail of Amnesty Day by visiting your friendly Joeten-Kiyu Public Library to borrow resources and take part in our activities and events with your family and friends!

On Dec. 20 and 21, 2024, we will be having our Photo Op with Santa! You can avail to ONE free 5"x7" photo, or request to have the photo sent directly to your email!

On Dec. 21 and 28, 2024, join us for our Saturday Read Aloud at the Children's Library that starts at 10:30am, followed by a craft activity, and a movie shortly after!

The Joeten-Kiyu Public Library, along with libraries everywhere, continues to adapt and expand services to meet the evolving needs of our community. Our mission is to preserve the CNMI's cultural heritage and connect people, libraries, and government to the resources and tools they need to succeed and build a stronger community. The Joeten-Kiyu Public Library thanks our entire CNMI community for your continued support over the years and for your help in promoting and advocating for literacy in the Marianas. Special thank you to the Joeten and Kiyu family for your continued support! Thank you to all of our patrons, donors, sponsors, volunteers, friends, community partners, and team! Your support is important and the library could not do what it does without you and your generosity. We humbly extend a very big heartfelt "Thank you, Si Yu'us Ma'åse' and Olomwaay"! Biba, Marianas! Biba, Joeten-Kiyu Public Library!

Please enjoy your public library's free resources by visiting our website at www.cnmilib.org like/follow JKPL's Facebook page @joetenkiyupubliclibrary, Instagram @joetenkiyupubliclibrary, Tik Tok @jkpl670, Twitter @JoetenKiyu, and YouTube: joeten kiyu public library or visit our website www.cnmilib.org to see the progress and programs JKPL has worked so hard to offer for our community. For more information regarding any of our activities, contact JKPL @670-235-7322/7318 (READ).

How can you help assist with our programs?

We welcome and encourage businesses to please consider donating Educational Tax Credit. Pursuant to NMI Public Law 15-120, the Joeten-Kiyu Public Library is able to receive cash contributions under Educational Tax Credit (ETC). Please make checks payable to: CNMI Treasury. For MUNIS payments, to the Friends of the Joeten-Kiyu Public Library MUNIS Vendor ID#100404.

This project was made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services LS-256853-OLS-24.

This project was made possible in part by the USDA Rural Development Community Facilities Grant.

The Joeten-Kiyu Public Library is an equal opportunity provider and employer. ***(PR)***

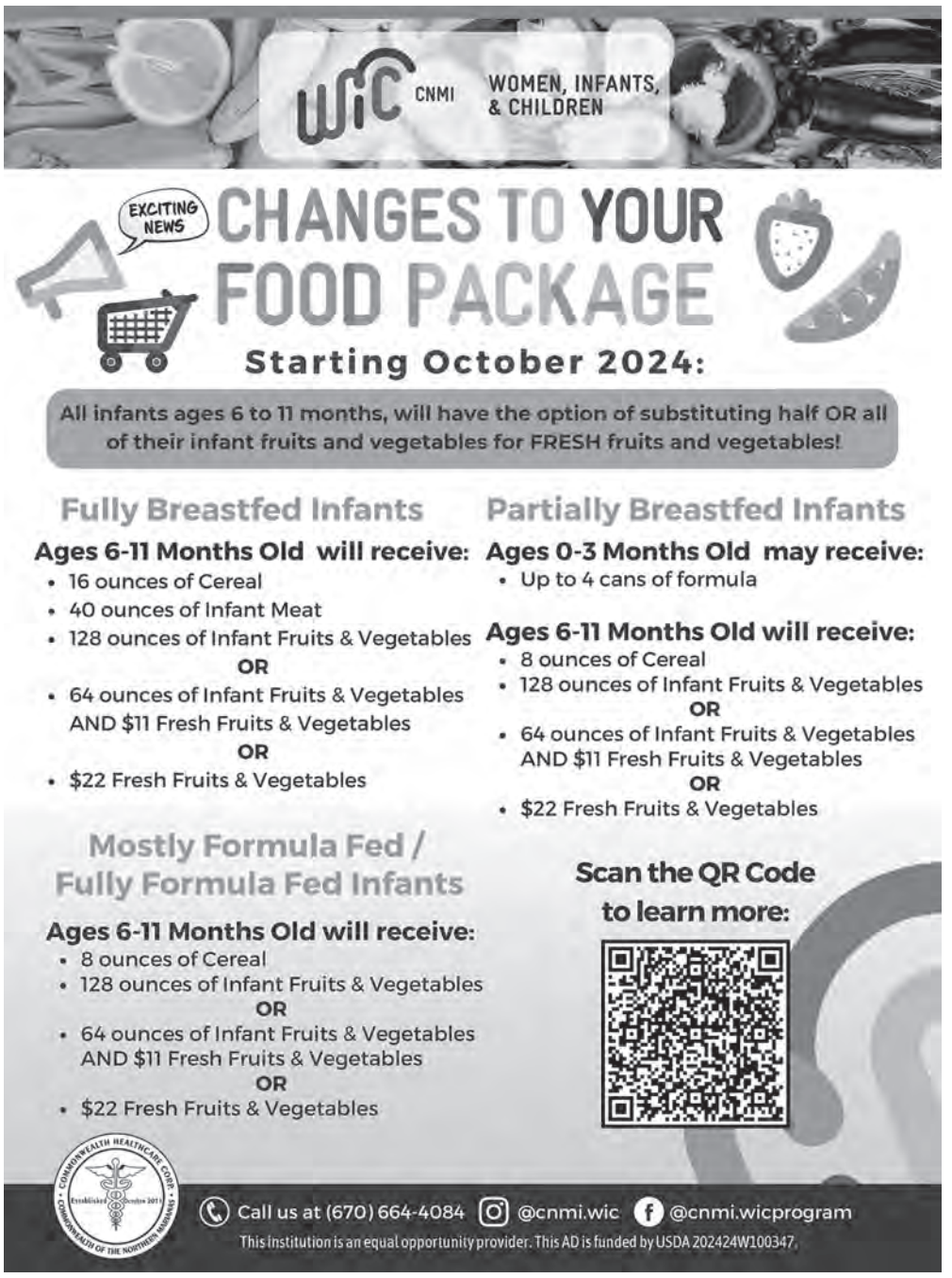
Free sack of rice distribution this Saturday at Koblerville

The Offices of the CNMI Governor and Lt. Governor would like to inform the residents of Saipan that there will be a community distribution drive this Saturday, Dec. 21, 2024 at 8am at the Koblerville Youth Center.

Participants will receive one 50-lb sack of rice per vehicle only. You need to present your driver's license and your license plate number will be recorded to prevent duplication of assistance. The event will be a drive-thru distribution. No walk-ins or walk-ups are allowed. Supply is limited to 2,000 sacks and available for distribution on a first come, first serve basis, while supplies last.

Motorists are asked to start at the southwest bound lane of Koblerville Road (see attached map). Traffic flow extends back into Chalan Monsignor Martinez Road and back into the village of San Antonio. Motorists are advised to obey traffic laws and to not obstruct businesses or residential driveways. The Department of Public Safety will be present at key locations to help direct the flow of traffic. Both the Department of Public Safety and the Department of Fire & Emergency Medical Services will be present to provide support during the distribution efforts.

For additional questions or information regarding the event, contact the Office of Grants Management & State Clearinghouse (organizers of the event) at (670) 664-9994. ***(PR)***


WIC CNMI WOMEN, INFANTS, & CHILDREN
EXCITING NEWS
CHANGES TO YOUR FOOD PACKAGE
Starting October 2024:
All infants ages 6 to 11 months, will have the option of substituting half OR all of their infant fruits and vegetables for FRESH fruits and vegetables!
Fully Breastfed Infants
Ages 6-11 Months Old will receive:
• 16 ounces of Cereal
• 40 ounces of Infant Meat
• 128 ounces of Infant Fruits & Vegetables
OR
• 64 ounces of Infant Fruits & Vegetables AND $11 Fresh Fruits & Vegetables
OR
• $22 Fresh Fruits & Vegetables
Partially Breastfed Infants
Ages 0-3 Months Old may receive:
• Up to 4 cans of formula
Ages 6-11 Months Old will receive:
• 8 ounces of Cereal
• 128 ounces of Infant Fruits & Vegetables
OR
• 64 ounces of Infant Fruits & Vegetables AND $11 Fresh Fruits & Vegetables
OR
• $22 Fresh Fruits & Vegetables
Mostly Formula Fed / Fully Formula Fed Infants
Ages 6-11 Months Old will receive:
• 8 ounces of Cereal
• 128 ounces of Infant Fruits & Vegetables
OR
• 64 ounces of Infant Fruits & Vegetables AND $11 Fresh Fruits & Vegetables
OR
• $22 Fresh Fruits & Vegetables
Scan the QR Code to learn more:
Call us at (670) 664-4084 @cnmi.wic @cnmi.wicprogram
This institution is an equal opportunity provider. This AD is funded by USDA 202424W100347.

COMMONWEALTH UTILITIES CORPORATION
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

INVITATION FOR BIDS
CUC-IFB-25-009

SEWER MAIN AND MANHOLE REPLACEMENT/REHAB/UPGRADE PHASE II

The Office of the Executive Director, Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC) is soliciting competitive sealed bids from qualified firms for the construction of the Sewer Main and Manhole Replacement/Rehab/Upgrade Phase II in Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

The project consists of realignment and replacement of the existing 4-inch bypass sewer line in **Capitol Hill Village** along **Capitol Hill Road** with a new 8-inch PVC distribution main. The scope includes the installation of appurtenances, fittings, new manholes with accessories, and the rehabilitation and reconnection of existing manholes, including the replacement of their accessories. All work must be performed in accordance with the Project Plans and Specifications, ensuring no disruption to the daily operation of the sewer system. The Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC) requires the project to be completed within three hundred sixty-five (365) calendar days from the date of contract award.

The project is funded by a grant from the United States of Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). The award of this project is contingent upon receipt of approval for project award from USEPA

Prospective Bidders must pre-register with the CUC Procurement & Supply Division. The Bid Package may be obtained from the CUC Procurement and Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, Saipan, between 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on government observed holidays, upon completion of registration and presentation of a receipt evidencing a non-refundable payment to the CUC Treasury Section, by cash, check or credit card in the amount of $200.00 (non-refundable) for one IFB package set.

A Pre-Bid Conference followed by site visits will be held on **December 23, 2024, at 10:00 AM(CHST)** at the CUC Main Conference Room, 3rd Floor, Room No.17, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building.

One (1) original and Five (5) hard copies of the bid MUST be submitted in a sealed envelope marked "**CUC-IFB-25-009, SEWER MAIN AND MANHOLE REPLACEMENT/REHAB/UPGRADE PHASE II**" to the CUC Procurement & Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, P.O. Box 501220, Saipan, MP 96950, no later than **10:00 AM (ChST) January 16, 2025**, at which time they will be publicly opened and read aloud. Bids mailed via postal or courier service must be received on or before due date and time or post-marked before due date and time.

Bid shall be submitted on the provided Bid Forms. Bidders are required to complete all Bid Forms. Bidders may supplement this form as appropriate. Bids will be required to be submitted under a condition of irrevocability for a period of 60 days after submission. **Late submissions and conditional bids will not be considered.**

A *Bid Guarantee* of not less than fifteen (15%) percent of the total bid price must accompany the bids. The security deposit may be in cash, certified check, cashier's check, or bid bond executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety. A Payment Bond of one hundred (100%) percent and a Performance Bond of one hundred (100%) percent of the total bid price will be required upon the execution of the contract by the successful bidder. The Payment and Performance bond must be executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety. Surety Company must be authorized to do business in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands or otherwise secured in a manner satisfactory to CUC, for the protection of all persons supplying labor and material to the contractor or its subcontractors for the performance of the work provided for in the contract.

All insurers' questions, concerns and qualification shall be handled by the Department of Commerce Office of the Insurance Commissioner (OIC). The OIC is tasked with regulating and monitoring compliance to the CNMI's Insurance Code (Title 4, Division 7). Bidders are required to submit a clearance from the OIC certifying their insurer of choice is in compliance with the CNMI's Insurance Code.

Bidders are required to comply with all CNMI and applicable Federal Laws. This bid and the ensuing contract shall be executed pursuant to the CUC Procurement Regulations.

This Invitation for Bids does not commit CUC to the award of a contract or contracts, nor to pay any cost incurred in the preparation and submission of bids in anticipation of a contract. Bidders are advised that CUC assumes no responsibility in any act of omission on the part of the bidders due to lack of information or understanding of the bid requirements in the course of Contractor's preparation of a bid under the contract.

Questions or requests for clarification will be entertained only from registered Proponents and must be submitted in writing no later than **10:00 a.m. (CHST) on December 30, 2024** to Manny B. Sablan, CUC Purchasing Officer via email address manny.sablan@cucgov.org with a copy to Joel Puyat, CUC Water/Wastewater Engineer at email joel.puyat@cucgov.org, and to Marcela Tenorio, P&S, Senior Administrative Technician at marcela.tenorio@cucgov.org.

CUC reserves the right to reject any or all bids and waive any imperfection in the bid proposal if in its sole opinion, to do so would be in the best interest of CUC. All bids shall become the property of CUC.

KEVIN O. WATSON
Executive Director

MANNY B. SABLAN
Purchasing Administrator

Opinion

Hafa Adai!
Saipan Tribune
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EDITORIAL

Presidential pardons done right: Unlike Hunter pardon, Biden's clemency grants are just

As President Joe Biden heads to the end of his time in the Oval Office, he is leaving with an act of compassion for those serving unnecessarily long federal prison sentences and who have perhaps been targeted by punitive laws that no longer fit in with our contemporary understandings of fairness and proportionality.

These grants of clemency were done the right way, through the Department of Justice Office of the Pardon Attorney under regular procedures, unlike how he broke his word and conferred on his legitimately convicted (but not sentenced) son Hunter " a full and unconditional pardon."

Last week, the president commuted the sentences of almost 1,500 nonviolent offenders who have already been serving sentences at home under the CARES Act. In addition, 39 people were pardoned, allowing them to continue their lives outside the shadow of a federal criminal conviction. This comes after Biden has already used these powers for justice, issuing blanket pardons for people convicted of minor marijuana offenses and for service members convicted for their sexual orientations.

As the White House notes, many of the sentences commuted would have been initially lower if they had been handed down today. Plus, a chunk of these pardons have been for crimes that no longer exist in their current form, or that we don't consider very serious.

In some important ways, the commutations are a recognition that some laws and sentencing guidelines were disproportionate and contrary to what should be the ultimate goal of criminal lockup: to issue some punishment, yes, but also to be dissuasive and to at least allow for the prospect of people returning to their lives with the ability and resolve to live better lives. Decades-long sentences for relatively minor and nonviolent offenses does not fulfill this goal, and does not ultimately keep anyone safer.

Except for the nonviolent aspect, the Hunter pardon does not fit the standard of last week's acts of executive clemency. It was issued prematurely before Hunter had been sentenced and had a chance to appeal his conviction and punishment through the court system. It also was a direct contravention of the president's promise to respect the ruling of the jury. It seems a family Thanksgiving on Nantucket mattered more than all that high-minded stuff.

As it stood, the Hunter pardon hurt Biden's legacy by being so self-interested and personal and it fed conspiracy theories of partisan federal prosecutions, which undermines the idea of equal justice under law.

One additional thing that the president might consider in his waning weeks at the helm is the commutation of some death row sentences to life imprisonment. At the end of his tenure, Donald Trump oversaw 13 executions, the only type of punishment that cannot be in any way reversed or patched up if laws change or mistakes are discovered during the criminal justice process. There have been situations where we have felt that capital punishment is warranted, but not every case is as cut and dried.

Trump, meanwhile, is already planning on using his pardon power on day one to pardon the Jan. 6 rioters, who attempted to overthrow democracy. With his act of mercy, Biden sets a better parting example.

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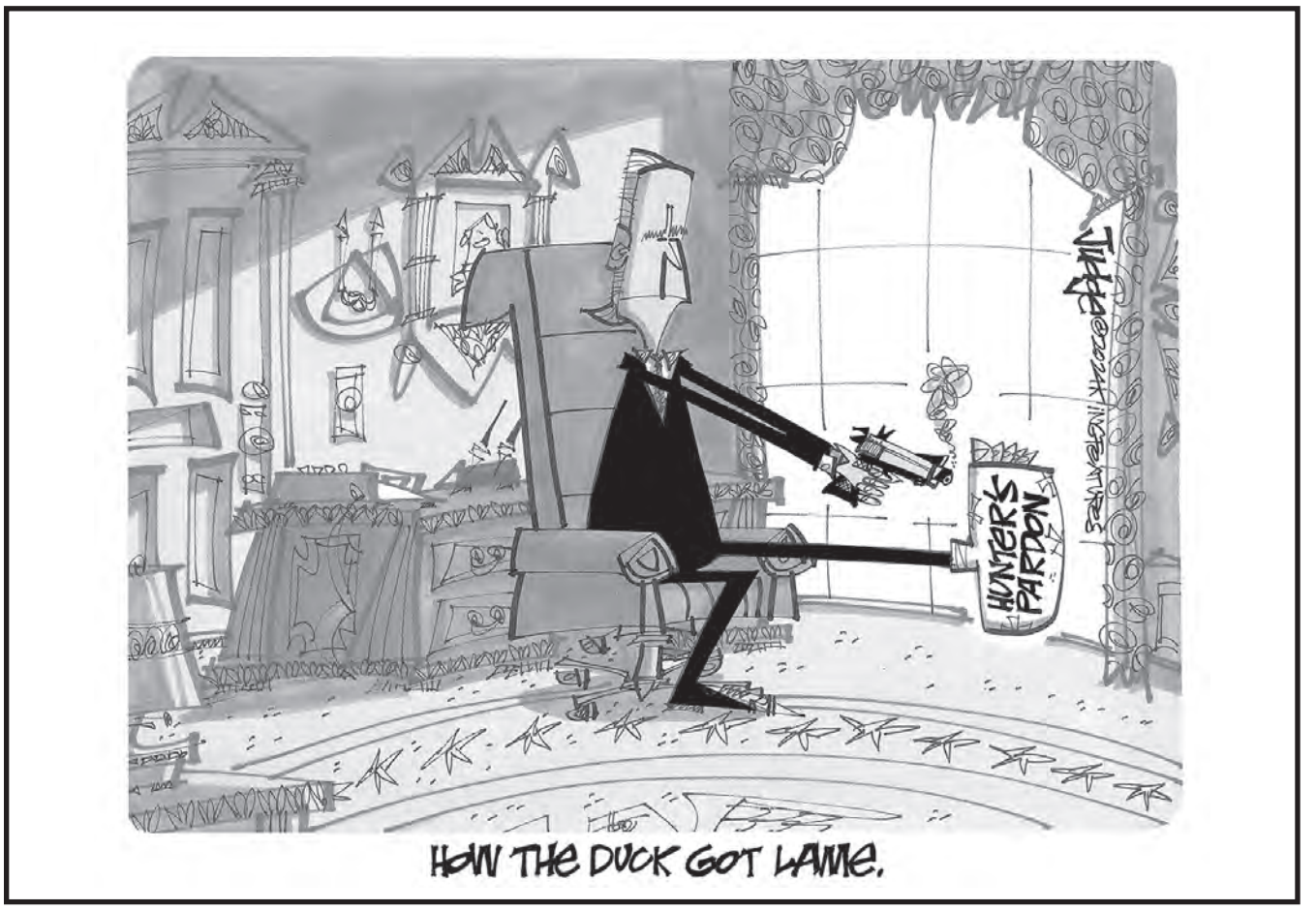


The US nuclear infrastructure is crumbling. There's a way to pay for it

By ROBERT PETERS
The Heritage Foundation

Robert Peters is the Nuclear Deterrence and Missile Defense Fellow at the Heritage Foundation.

For almost 80 years, America's nuclear arsenal has served as the ultimate guarantor of security for ourselves and our allies. But our missile systems are aging and are well past their programmed lifespan. Unless dramatic action is taken—and soon—it won't be long before our adversaries can discount any threat from the U.S. nuclear arsenal.

Our antiquated nuclear deterrent is a relic of the Cold War, with systems desperately in need of replacement. The newest nuclear weapon in the arsenal is over 30 years old. America's Minuteman intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) were supposed to be replaced when Ronald Reagan was still president, and the Navy's ballistic missile submarine fleet will soon be overdue for its own retirement.

The good news: A modernization effort is underway. All of these Cold War-era systems are being replaced—simultaneously—with next-generation missiles, warheads, bombers and submarines. The bad news: It's moving much too slowly if we expect to keep us safe in the years ahead.

The next-generation ballistic missile submarine, for example, is years behind schedule. The Department of Energy says that America's nuclear enterprise won't be producing new plutonium pits or warheads at scale until the mid-2030s.

But the biggest problems are that America's next-generation ICBM, the Sentinel program, is 87% over budget and behind schedule. This is because much of the infrastructure surrounding the rocket—the underground tunnels, the command-and-control systems, the computer systems, the wiring, the missile silos themselves—all need to be replaced, in addition to the missile itself.

In short, the United States has to rebuild the infrastructure we put in place during the Cold War.

Some have argued that the U.S. should simply "life-extend" the existing ICBM program, but the Air Force has certified that this is no longer technically feasible. Constantly switching out parts from a 1975 Cadillac and hunting for fewer and fewer specialized mechanics over time to keep it running can only last for so long before it's cheaper and better to just buy a new car.

Tragically, the annual congressional appropriations process means the Cadillac is in a garage, slowly rusting. Limited increases in the defense budget have not resulted in additional investment in our nuclear deterrent. For far too long the congressional appropriations process has grown the Pentagon bureaucracy and funded questionable research and development spending that won't help America deter our adversaries or win a war.

There is, however, another way. Congress should use the reconciliation process to establish a Triad Infrastructure Modernization Fund (TIMF) to modernize our nuclear weapons and enable America's strategic deterrent for generations to come.

Reconciliation is a special legislative process that bypasses the Senate filibuster and allows simple majorities in both the Senate and House to enact multi-year spending. It can be used to modernize our nuclear deterrent without having to grow the rest of the federal government. Using reconciliation allows national security leaders in Congress to avoid the "I'll give you more domestic discretionary spending if you give me more defense spending" trade that is so often found in annual spending bills.

What would the TIMF entail? It would pay for nuclear infrastructure modernization such as the construction of missile silos, submarine berths, tunnels, plutonium pit production lines, warhead design and fabrication capabilities, and the nuclear command-and-control centers built during the Cold War. The legislation would put very specific limits on what projects and programs would be funded by TIMF resources—and any projects not directly related to America's nuclear infrastructure would not receive these funds.

Unlike the annual appropriations bills with short-term time limits, a reconciliation bill for nuclear modernization could be used for up to 10 years after being signed into law. It would enable smart long-term planning and fund $10 billion of infrastructure improvements a year—meaning that over the next decade, the United States would pump $100 billion dollars into nuclear facilities in Georgia, Washington state, South Carolina, New Mexico, Texas and the missile fields of the High Plains.

The TIMF would not be a permanent increase to the defense budget. It would not be about throwing money at a problem. It would meet today's needs to maintain America's strategic deterrent without cutting into the military's combat capabilities of the future.

It would be a one-time effort that would cover the buy-in cost to build America's strategic deterrent of the 21st century.

Given the threats posed by our adversaries in Beijing, Moscow, Tehran, and Pyongyang, America can't afford to live in a world without a credible nuclear deterrent.

EDITORIAL POLICY Letters to the editor must include the NAME, VILLAGE ADDRESS, and CONTACT NUMBER of the contributor. Letters that do not have these information will immediately be trashed. Contributions consisting of 500 words or less have more chances of getting published. The *Saipan Tribune* reserves the right to publish a contribution or not; the right to edit submissions for length, accuracy, and clarity; and the right to publish and distribute contributions in print, electronic, or other media formats. Submissions may be sent via snail mail to the 2nd Floor, JP Center, Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan, 96950; fax (670) 235-3740; e-mail to editor@saipantribune.com; or through our website at www.saipantribune.com.

Truth 77: The subterfuge of Republicans—Democrats and citizens!

By AMBROSE M. BENNETT
Special to the Saipan Tribune

Ambrose M. Bennett is an economist who minored in sociology, political scientist, a retired teacher, and former CNMI Board of Education member, a James Madison Fellow (U.S. constitutional scholar), a Fulbright-Hays and lifetime humanities scholar who resides in Kagman III in the CNMI.

The truth of the matter is first and foremost there needs to be an investigation and a writ to put the GOP power-subterfuge in check, as it is clear CPA, a Republican strong-hole and CEDA, another Republican strong-hole, clearly appear to be working in concert to get rid of Star Marianas and replace them with Marianas Air—skullduggery for true! Star Marianas needs to take CPA to court to insure a fair outcome. I predicted the smell would get worse, and now Mr. Tudela, CPA's executive director, whom I truly respect, is even running for cover behind his attorney and I don't blame him. It truly appears that someone very powerful in the GOP is driving and pulling the strings for this attack on Star Marianas while the unknown Marianas Air is getting the royal treatment in our faces and even taking money out of our pockets in taxes. Yes, they can offer cheaper fares because we will have paid for them in 25 years of uncollected taxes—I guess we're supposed to be stupid!

The governor suddenly claiming CEDA as being our economic experts after all these years didn't fool me nor anyone who has been paying attention. I knew CEDA was covering for the governor and now we can all see the real reason why. The governor had to be part of this subterfuge, as he had to know the variables and issues in this matter when he turned it over to his Republicans at CPA and CEDA to literally do his dirty work. Why would we the people want to get rid of Star Marianas and their taxes for Marianas Air and no taxes when both are offering the very same service—it's ka du ku, for true, but we are not stupid governor! I also know from their previous lackadaisicalness that our Legislature is not going to weigh in with checks and balances nor oversight on the governor and this issue. So, I will speak up for the people, as I want to know when and where is the people's public hearing on this Republican powerplay (subterfuge), as no taxes is truly an issue for the House and/or the people, but surely not CEDA. We saw the GOP's no taxes movie with Best Sunshine, and here it is again! There's also Ralph's BOOST giveaway and now it's Arnold's Cannabis Commissioner nepotism and Marianas Air favoritism with no-taxes giveaway, heller oversight where are U!

We have all seen these GOP powerplays before, look at how they shut La Fieata down for taya, look at the exclusive casino deal and no taxes that killed Tinian's casino and now our economy, look at the Managaha deal of big business running over the small guys, and now its interisland air travel. It's not that I don't like Republicans, it's the fact that the Republicans starting with Fitial became corrupt and are dug- n soooo deep in all of our boards and commissions. Republicans have absolute power and we are seeing how absolute power absolutely corrupts. When are the Democrats in the Legislature going to start doing their job for the people with real checks and balances and stop the rubber-stamping for the governor. Where are the local concerned citizens and activists or group going to show up to stop this subterfuge saying enough! Why should we the people, give up millions in taxes over the next 25 years so Marianas Air can establish their virtual monopoly, as competition will not be able to compete with Marianas Air's tax-free operation creating a virtual exclusive airline powerplay by Republicans for Marianas Air that we saw with the casino. This GOP is still using the same-o subterfuge playbook, yet no one is trying to stop them, as we need scores for the people, not for the GOP. We get what the majority vote for, Republican subterfuge and if the Democrats and the people don't change, and start fighting for the CNMI, the CNMI will never change for the better—for true!

On a personal note: Its obvious the governor should have asked me to be his advisor instead of stabbing me in the back to save his relative Joe Palacios' job—not worth it! Now Joe Palacios, who lied about his 144 IQ, is smiling but can't do anything to help the governor nor the CNMI—for true!

People thought 'A Charlie Brown Christmas' would fail. Sincerity powered its success

By STEPHEN LIND
Los Angeles Times

It's hard to imagine the holidays without "A Charlie Brown Christmas." The 1965 broadcast has become a staple of the season for many generations.

But this beloved TV special almost didn't make it to air. CBS executives thought the 25-minute program was too slow, too serious and too different from the upbeat spectacles they imagined audiences wanted. A cartoon about a depressed kid seeking psychiatric advice with no laugh track, lo-fi animation and a Bible passage seemed destined to fail.

Yet against all the odds, it became a classic. The program turned "Peanuts" from a popular comic strip into a multimedia empire—not because it was flashy or followed the rules, but because it was sincere.

As a business professor who has studied the "Peanuts" franchise, I see "A Charlie Brown Christmas" as a fascinating historical moment. These days it's unlikely that an unassuming comic strip character voicing hefty, thought-provoking ideas would make it to air. The special came together out of a last-minute scramble. Somewhat out of the blue, producer Lee Mendelson got a call from advertising agency McCann-Erickson: Coca-Cola wanted to sponsor an animated Christmas special.

Mendelson had previously failed to convince the agency to sponsor a "Peanuts" documentary. This time, though, he assured McCann-Erickson that the characters would be a perfect fit.

Mendelson called up comic strip creator Charles "Sparky" Schulz and told him he had just sold "A Charlie Brown Christmas"—and they would have mere months to write, animate, and bring the special to air.

Schulz, Mendelson and animator Bill Melendez worked fast to piece together a storyline. The cartoonist wanted to tell a story that cut through the glitz of holiday commercialism and brought the focus back to something deeper.

While Snoopy tries to win a Christmas lights contest, and Lucy names herself "Christmas queen" in the neighborhood play, a forlorn Charlie Brown searches for "the real meaning of Christmas." He makes his way to the local lot of aluminum trees, a fad at the time. But he's drawn to the one real tree—a humble, scraggly little thing—inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale "The Fir Tree."

Those plot points would likely delight the network, but other choices Schulz made were proving controversial.

TNS

"A Charlie Brown Christmas," directed by Bill Melendez. The 1965 broadcast has become a staple of the season for many generations.

The show would use real children's voices instead of adult actors', giving the characters an authentic, simple charm. And Schulz refused to add a laugh track, a standard in animated TV at the time. He wanted the sincerity of the story to stand on its own, without artificial prompts for laughter.

Meanwhile, Mendelson brought in jazz musician Vince Guaraldi to compose a soundtrack. The music was unlike anything typically heard in animated programming, blending provocative depth with the innocence of childhood.

Most alarming to the executives was Schulz's insistence on including the heart of the Nativity story in arguably the special's most pivotal scene.

When Charlie Brown joyfully returns to his friends with the spindly little tree, the gang ridicules his choice. "I guess I really don't know what Christmas is all about," he sighs.

Gently but confidently, Linus assures him, "I can tell you what Christmas is all about." Calling for "Lights, please," he quietly walks to the center of the stage.

In the stillness, Linus recites the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 2, with its story of an angel appearing to trembling shepherds: "And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a savior, which is Christ the Lord."

He concludes with the words of the "great company" who appeared with the heavenly host: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men," and picks up his security blanket and walks into the wings. The rest of the gang soon recognizes that Charlie Brown's tree isn't so bad, after all—it just "needs a little love."

When Schulz discussed this idea with Mendelson and Melendez, they were hesitant. For much of U.S. history, Protestant Christianity was the default in American culture, but in the years since World War II, society had grown somewhat more mindful of making room for Catholic and Jewish Americans. Unsure how to handle the shifting norms, many mainstream entertainment companies in the 1960s tended to avoid religious topics.

When they saw the proofs of the special, CBS executives were spooked by the Bible aspects. But there was simply no time to redo the entire dramatic arc and pulling it was not an option, given that the sponsor's advertisements had already run.

Fortunately for the "Peanuts" franchise, when the special aired on Dec. 9, 1965, it was an instant success. Nearly half of American households tuned in, and the program won an Emmy and a Peabody Award. Schulz had tapped into something audiences were craving: an honest, heartfelt message that cut through the commercialism.

Millions of viewers have continued to tune in to the special in the almost 60 years since it first aired.

When I was researching my spiritual biography of Schulz, one of my favorite finds was a 1965 letter from a Florida viewer, Betty Knorr. She praised the show for stressing "the true meaning of the Christmas season" at a time when "the mention of God in general [is] being hush hushed."

The magic of Schulz's work, though, is that it resonates across demographics and ideologies. Some fans find comfort in the show's gentle message of faith, while others embrace it in a purely secular way.

Schulz's art and gentle humor act as safe entry points for some pretty hefty thoughts—be they psychiatric, cultural or theological. Or "Peanuts" cartoons can simply be heartwarming, festive entertainment.

Today, both the "Peanuts" empire and the Christmas industry are thriving. Back in the 1960s, commercial realities almost derailed Schulz's special, yet those same forces ultimately ensured its broadcast. The result is a lasting touchstone of innocence, hope and belief.

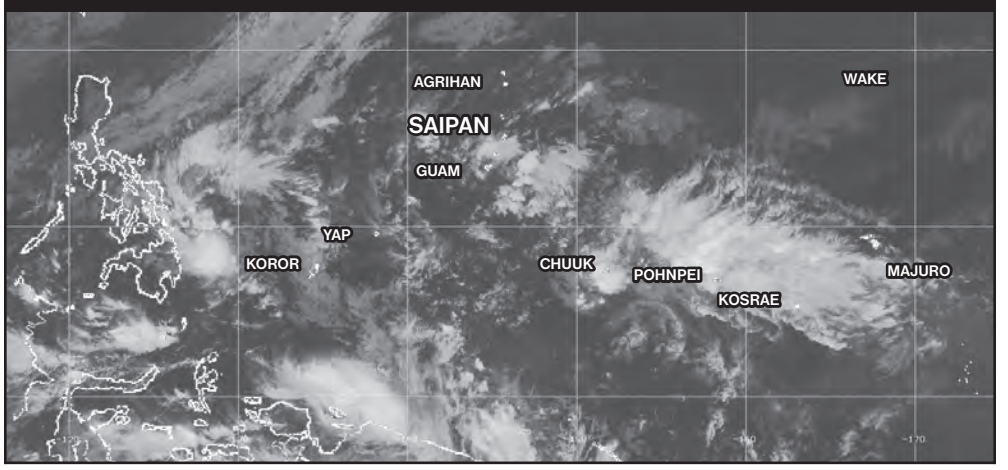
Stephen Lind is an associate professor of clinical business communication at USC's Marshall School of Business and the author of "A Charlie Brown Religion." This article was produced in partnership with the Conversation.

The Weather

5-DAY FORECAST FOR SAIPAN AND TINIAN

TODAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY
Mostly cloudy. Scattered showers and isolated thunderstorms. East to southeast winds 10 to 20 mph. Chance of showers 50 percent.	Mostly cloudy. A 40 percent chance of showers and a slight chance of thunderstorms. East winds 15 to 20 mph.	Mostly cloudy. A 40 percent chance of showers and slight chance of thunderstorms.	Mostly cloudy. A 40 percent chance of showers and slight chance of thunderstorms.	Partly cloudy with a 20 percent chance of showers.
87° / 77°	86° / 78°	86° / 77°	86° / 77°	87° / 78°

YESTERDAY'S SATELLITE IMAGE



PICTURE TIME: 4:51 PM WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2024

Western North Pacific between equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

A High Surf Advisory along north facing reefs, Small Craft Advisory remain in effect through this evening. A high risk of rip currents along north and east facing reefs and a moderate risk on south and west facing reefs. Over night, the showers the incoming showers were a little stronger than expected. Winds were the main concern over night as there were brief periods of 30 mph winds with gusts to 40 mph. Scattered showers ers seen on satellite imagery move towards the Marianas. Model guidance does show a fairly dry mid and upper levels becoming more saturated as the day progress. Depending on how this region interacts, showers may need to be increased. Altimetry shows combined seas of 7 to 10 feet just east of the Marianas. Winds are expected to be moderate to strong over the next day or so before gradually diminishing to moderate to fresh.

Satellite image and accompanying information are provided by the National Weather Service. For an updated weather forecast, visit the National Weather Service Guam homepage: https://www.weather.gov/gum/

MICRONESIA		▲ ▼ °F
Guam and Rota	Partly Cloudy	88° / 79°
Palau	Mostly Cloudy	86° / 78°
Yap	Mostly Cloudy	88° / 80°
Chuuk	Cloudy	86° / 80°
Pohnpei	Cloudy	86° / 79°
Kosrae	Light Rain Shower	86° / 78°
Majuro	Cloudy	84° / 80°

AROUND THE GLOBE		▲ ▼ °F
Auckland	Fair	75° / 55°
Beijing	Fair	42° / 22°
Hong Kong	Fair	68° / 61°
Honolulu	Partly Cloudy	78° / 68°
London	Cloudy	50° / 45°
Los Angeles	Mostly Sunny	70° / 50
Manila	Mostly Cloudy	86° / 76°
Melbourne	Sunny	84° / 64°
Miami	Partly Cloudy	78° / 69°
New York	Clear	59° / 29°
Osaka	Partly Cloudy	54° / 44°
Paris	Mostly Cloudy	46° / 43°
Busan	Partly Cloudy	46° / 28°
Rome	Mostly Sunny	57° / 46°
Salem	Mostly Sunny	50° / 32°
San Francisco	Showers	56° / 45°
Seoul	Sunny	37° / 16°
Tokyo	Partly Cloudy	56° / 39°
Washington, DC	Fair	64° / 47°

DAY	SUNRISE	SUNSET
Today	6:37 AM	5:50 PM
Friday	6:37 AM	5:51 PM
Saturday	6:38 AM	5:51 PM
Sunday	6:38 AM	5:52 PM
Monday	6:39 AM	5:52 PM

DAY	MOONRISE	MOONSET	MOONRISE
Today	-	9:54 AM	9:34 PM
Friday	-	10:35 AM	10:26 PM
Saturday	-	11:12 AM	11:14 PM
Sunday	-	11:46 AM	-
Monday	12:00 AM	12:19 PM	-

TIDES: SAIPAN HARBOR TODAY		FEET
4:17 AM	Low Tide	-0.57
11:47 AM	High Tide	1.66
5:10 PM	Low Tide	1.12
9:19 PM	High Tide	1.53

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FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF DECEMBER 1, 2024

DEPARTURES

SAIPAN-GUAM (GUM)

UA076	9:50AM	10:35AM	Daily

SAIPAN- NARITA (NRT)

UA824	1:20PM	4:00PM	1, 3, 5

GUAM-MANILA (MNL)

PR 111	5:55AM	7:55AM	Daily
UA183	7:55PM	9:50PM	Daily
UA193	7:55PM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Palau

SAIPAN-MANILA (MNL)

7C3218/2305	2:45AM	10:20PM	Daily via Incheon
UA076/183 Guam	9:50AM	9:50PM	Daily via
UA076/193	9:50AM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Guam, Palau

SAIPAN-INCHEON (ICN)

TW308	2:30AM	6:25AM	Daily
7C3218	2:45AM	6:45AM	Daily from Dec 8
7C3212	4:35PM	8:25PM	Daily

SAIPAN-BUSAN (PUS)

7C3552	3:55AM	7:20AM	3, 6 from Dec 25

SAIPAN-HONG KONG (HKG)

HX77	3:05AM	5:55AM	1, 5

ARRIVALS

GUAM (GUM)-SAIPAN

UA174	8:00AM	8:45AM	Daily

NARITA (NRT)-SAIPAN

UA825	5:30PM	10:05PM	2, 4, 7

MANILA (MNL)-GUAM

UA156	00:40AM	6:25AM	3, 6
PR110	10:05PM	3:55AM+1	Daily
UA192	10:40PM	6:30AM+1	2, 5 via Palau
UA184	10:55PM	4:40AM+1	1, 3, 4, 6, 7

MANILA (MNL)-SAIPAN

UA156	00:40AM	8:45AM	3, 6 via Guam
UA192/174	10:40PM	8:45AM+1	2, 5 via Palau, Guam
UA184/174	10:55PM	8:45AM +1	1, 3, 4, 6,7 via Guam
7C2306/3407	11:20PM	3:30PM+1	Daily

INCHEON (ICN)-SAIPAN

7C3211	10:10AM	3:30PM	Daily
TW307	8:00PM	1:30AM+1	Daily
7C3217	8:10PM	1:40AM+1	Daily from Dec 8

BUSAN (PUS)-SAIPAN

7C3551	9:25PM	2:50AM+1	2, 5 from Dec 25

HONG KONG (HKG)-SAIPAN

HX76	6:25PM	1:35AM+1	4, 7

LEGEND: Days: Monday (1), Tuesday (2), Wednesday (3), Thursday (4), Friday (5), Saturday (6) and Sunday (7); UA United Airlines; PR, Philippine Airlines; TW, T'Way Air; OZ, Asiana Airlines; 7C, Jeju Air; BX, Air Busan • ETD: Estimated Time of Departure; ETA: Estimated Time of Arrival. *(The Saipan Tribune is not responsible for any changes in the schedule.)*

STAR MARIANAS AIR, INC.

FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF JANUARY 2, 2024

SAIPAN TO ROTA

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1301	SAIPAN	ROTA	08:30	09:00	Daily
1302	SAIPAN	ROTA	10:30	11:00	Daily
1303	SAIPAN	ROTA	15:30	16:00	Daily

ROTA TO SAIPAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3101	ROTA	SAIPAN	9:30	10:00	Daily
3102	ROTA	SAIPAN	11:30	12:00	Saturday & Sunday
3103	ROTA	SAIPAN	13:30	14:00	Monday To Friday
3104	ROTA	SAIPAN	16:30	17:00	Daily

ROTA TO GUAM

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3401	ROTA	GUAM	11:30	12:00	Monday To Friday

GUAM TO ROTA

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
4301	GUAM	ROTA	12:30	13:00	Monday To Friday

SAIPAN TO TINIAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1201	SAIPAN	TINIAN	7:30	7:45	Daily
1202	SAIPAN	TINIAN	8:00	8:15	Daily
1203	SAIPAN	TINIAN	9:00	9:15	Daily
1204	SAIPAN	TINIAN	10:00	10:15	Daily
1206	SAIPAN	TINIAN	14:00	14:15	Daily
1207	SAIPAN	TINIAN	15:00	15:15	Daily
1208	SAIPAN	TINIAN	16:00	16:15	Daily
1209	SAIPAN	TINIAN	17:00	17:15	Daily

TINIAN TO SAIPAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
2101	TINIAN	SAIPAN	8:00	8:15	Daily
2102	TINIAN	SAIPAN	8:30	8:45	Daily
2103	TINIAN	SAIPAN	9:30	9:45	Daily
2104	TINIAN	SAIPAN	10:30	10:45	Daily
2106	TINIAN	SAIPAN	14:30	14:45	Daily
2107	TINIAN	SAIPAN	15:30	15:45	Daily
2108	TINIAN	SAIPAN	16:30	16:45	Daily
2109	TINIAN	SAIPAN	17:30	17:45	Daily

Business

Announcing 2024 *Guam Business Magazine* EXECUTIVE OF THE YEAR NOMINEES

Wade

Eun

Guerrero

Kim-Young

Taitano

Calvo

Clark

BARRIGADA, Guam—*Guam Business Magazine* is pleased to announce the nominees for the 2024 Guam Business Magazine Executive of the Year.

The nominees are:

- Kim Anderson Young, president, Security Title Inc.
- Paul A. Calvo, president and CEO, Calvo's Insurance Underwriters
- Tamio "Tom" Clark, principal broker, Blue Pacific Realty
- Ho S. Eun, founder and chairman, Core Tech International Group of Companies
- Joe C. Guerrero, co-owner, Naked Fish Bar & Grill and principal consultant for Transcends Consulting
- Michael A. Taitano, CEO, XVI Corp. which does business as Guam Service Pros
- Craig Wade, president and chief financial officer, JRV Group, which does business as Mid Pac Far East LLC, Commercial Tire Depot LLC, Napa Auto Parts, and RKM Property Group LLC

The winner will be revealed at the Feb. 1, 2025 Executive of the Year Gala at the Hyatt Regency Guam, together with the release of the January-February 2025 issue of *Guam Business Magazine*, which will feature the awardee on the cover.

Since 1983, the title of Executive of the Year has been awarded to recognize executives who have made outstanding contributions to the business communities of Micronesia; have raised the bar in their fields and are considerably involved in the community.

Past Executive of the Year recipients include Robert H. Jones of Triple J Enterprises Inc. (1983); John M. Borlas of IT&E Overseas Inc. (1984); Philip J. Flores of BankPacific (1985); Doris Flores Brooks of the Office of Public Accountability (1986); Mark V. Pangilinan of M.V. Pangelinan Enterprises Inc. (1987); Allen A. Pickens of Tax-Aide (1988); the late T. Roy Sullivan of Jones & Guerrero Co. (1989); Kurt S. Moylan of Moylan's Insurance (1990); the late Akira "Mike" Baba of Baba Corp. (1991); the late Paul M. Calvo of Calvo Enterprises Inc. (1992); Antoinette D. Sanford of Sanford Technology Group (1993); the late Kenneth T. Jones of Jones & Guerrero Co. (1994); the late Edward M. Calvo of Calvo Enterprises Inc. (1995); L. Carl Peterson of Money Resources Inc. (1996); William R. Thompson (1997) of Atkins Kroll Inc.; the late John K. Lee of First Hawaiian Bank (1998); the late Henry L. Schnabel of Calvo's Insurance Underwriters (1999); Marian Aldan-Pierce of DFS Saipan (2000); Manfred H. Pieper of Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia (2001); Thomas G. Ahillen of Asia Pacific Solutions LLC (2002); Juan T. Guerrero of Herman's Modern Bakery Inc. (2003); Joseph M. Crisostomo of Cars Plus LLC, Cycles Plus and Payless Car Rental (2004); Joseph "Jerry" Kramer of Pacific International Inc. (2004); David M. Sablan of Century Group of Companies (2005); the late Alfred C. Ysrael of Tanota Partners (2006); Lee P. Webber of MDA Guam (2007); Laura-Lynn V. Dacanay of First Hawaiian Bank (2008); Jerry Cho Yee Tan of Tan Holdings Inc. (2009); Lourdes A. "Lou" Leon Guerrero of Bank of Guam (2010); Jay R. Shedd of IT&E (2011); Jerrold C. Johnson of Hawaiian Rock Products (2012); George Chiu of Tan Holdings (2013); Norman T. Tenorio of Joeten Enterprises Inc., Pacifica Insurance Underwriters Inc., Tropical Instant Press Inc., Saipan Shipping Co., Saipan Stevedore and Advance Carrier (2014); Jeffrey B. Jones of Triple J Enterprises Inc. (2015); Jose C. "Joe" Ayuyu of McDonald's of Guam and Saipan, RJ Corp. and RJ Guam LLC (2016); Leonard K. Kaae Sr. of Black Construction Corp. (2017); Bernadette N. Valencia of Matson Navigation Inc. (2018); AnneMarie T. Muna, of AM Insurance (2019); Edward G. Untalan of First Hawaiian Bank (2021); Thomas G. Shimizu (2022), and David A. Alcorn (2023).

For additional information or inquiries, contact Maureen N. Maratita, publisher of *Guam Business Magazine*; at publisher@glimpsesofguam.com or on (671) 687-2505. ***(PR)***

Congress unveils funding deal with more than $100B in disaster aid

WASHINGTON (AP)—Congressional leaders have unveiled a stopgap spending bill that will keep the federal government funded through March 14 and provide more than $100 billion in emergency aid to help states and local communities recover from Hurricanes Helene and Milton and other natural disasters.

The measure would prevent a partial government shutdown set to begin after midnight Friday. It would kick final decisions on this budget year's spending levels to a new Republican-led Congress and President-elect Donald Trump. The continuing resolution generally continues current spending levels for agencies.

Passage of the measure is one of the final actions that lawmakers will consider this week before adjourning for the holidays and making way for the next Congress. It's the second short-term funding measure the lawmakers have taken up this fall as they struggled to pass the dozen annual appropriations bills before the new fiscal year began Oct. 1, as they typically do.

The bill will provide $100.4 billion in disaster relief, with an additional $10 billion in economic assistance for farmers struggling with low commodity prices and high input costs.

"We have to be able to help those who are in these dire straits," said House Speaker Mike Johnson told reporters.

Net farm income is projected to decline 4.1% this year after falling 19.4% the year before from the record highs reached in 2022. Johnson indicated more farm aid could be delivered in the next Congress, saying "we can't do all it right now."

"Congress is doing the best it can under difficult circumstances, and I think it will be a big boost for the industry," Johnson said.

Rep. Glenn Thompson, the Republican chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, said he was hoping for more economic relief for farmers, but "it's a great start."

"I think it's going to send the right signal to the markets that most farmers and ranchers are going to be able to get eligible for the credit they need to borrow in order to plant a crop or raise a herd," Thompson said.

President Joe Biden has sought about $114 billion in disaster aid, submitting a $99 billion request in November, telling lawmakers the funding was "urgently needed." The administration subsequently updated its request to include funding to repair federal facilities damaged due to natural disasters.

The largest share of the money, about $29 billion, will go to the main disaster relief fund at the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The fund helps with debris removal, repairing public infrastructure and providing financial assistance to survivors. About $21 billion goes to help farmers who have experienced crop or livestock losses.

Another $8 billion will go to help rebuild and repair highways and bridges in more than 40 states and territories. And some $12 billion would go toward helping communities recover through block grants administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. About $2.2 billion would go to low-interest loans for businesses, nonprofits and homeowners trying to rebuild after a disaster.

"While this is not the legislation I would have written on my own, it is a strong, bipartisan package that provides the resources communities urgently need to recover," said Sen. Patty Murray, the Democratic chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Congress is expected to pass the measure just before another shutdown deadline. House Republicans generally give lawmakers 72 hours to review text of the legislation, which would push a vote on final passage to Friday if they follow through on that rule. The Senate is not known for acting speedily, but many lawmakers are anxious to adjourn for the year and make way for the next Congress.

Since the bill is the last must-pass legislation of the current Congress, lawmakers have worked to get certain priorities included. On the health care front, the legislation seeks to extend coverage of telehealth appointments for Medicare enrollees and rein in how much money pharmacy benefits managers—the companies that negotiate how and what drugs are covered by insurance plans—make off those deals.

The bill also includes provisions focused on countering China, including expanding on a Biden executive order that seeks to restrict investments into countries that pose a national security threat to the United States. Blocking China's high-tech ambitions is one of the few issues that enjoys broad support in Washington from both Republicans and Democrats.

There's also a provision to transfer the land that is the site of the old RFK Stadium from the federal government to the District of Columbia, which could potentially lead to a new stadium for the Washington Commanders.

The legislation also provides full federal funding to rebuild Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge, which collapsed when struck by a cargo ship that reported losing power just before the crash. Federal taxpayers will be reimbursed through proceeds from insurance payments and litigation.

World

Top Russian general killed in Moscow bombing claimed by Ukraine

A senior Russian general was killed Tuesday by a bomb hidden in a scooter outside his apartment building in Moscow, a day after Ukraine's security service leveled criminal charges against him. A Ukrainian official said the service carried out the attack.

Lt. Gen. Igor Kirillov, the chief of the military's nuclear, biological and chemical protection forces, was killed as he left for his office. Kirillov's assistant also died in the attack.

Kirillov, 54, was under sanctions from several countries, including the U.K. and Canada, for his actions in Moscow's war in Ukraine. On Monday, Ukraine's Security Service, or SBU, opened a criminal investigation against him, accusing him of directing the use of banned chemical weapons.

AP

Maj. Gen. Igor Kirillov, the chief of the Russian military's radiation, chemical and biological protection unit, attends a briefing in Kubinka Patriot park, outside Moscow, Russia, on June 22, 2018.

An official with the SBU said the agency was behind the attack. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to release the information, described Kirillov as a "war criminal and an entirely legitimate target."

The SBU has said it recorded more than 4,800 occasions when Russia used chemical weapons on the battlefield since its full-scale invasion in February 2022. In May, the U.S. State Department said that it had recorded the use of chloropicrin, a poison gas first deployed in World War I, against Ukrainian troops.

Russia has denied using any chemical weapons in Ukraine and, in turn, has accused Kyiv of using toxic agents in combat.

Kirillov, who took his current job in 2017, was one of the most high-profile figures to level those accusations. He held numerous briefings to accuse the Ukrainian military of using toxic agents and planning to launch attacks with radioactive substances—claims that Ukraine and its Western allies rejected as propaganda.

The bomb used in Tuesday's attack was triggered remotely, according to Russian news reports. Images from the scene showed shattered windows and scorched brickwork.

The SBU official provided video that they said was of the bombing. It shows two men leaving a building shortly before a blast fills the frame.

Russia's top state investigative agency said it's looking into Kirillov's death as a case of terrorism, and officials in Moscow vowed to punish Ukraine.

Dmitry Medvedev, deputy head of Russia's Security Council chaired by President Vladimir Putin, described the attack as an attempt by Kyiv to distract public attention from its military failures and vowed that its "senior military-political leadership will face inevitable retribution."

Some Russian military bloggers and hawkish commentators made unsubstantiated claims that the U.S. could have been involved in Kirillov's killing.

Asked about Kirillov's death, U.S. State Department spokesman Matthew Miller told reporters Tuesday: "The United States was not aware of it in advance and was not involved."

Speaking on the sidelines of a summit in Estonia, Sweden's Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson said he did not have details of the attack but told The Associated Press that it would be understandable for the Ukrainians "to do everything in their power to hit back."

In the past year, Russia has been on the front foot in the war, grinding deeper into the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine despite heavy losses. ***(AP)***

Christians in Syria mark country's transformation with tears as UN envoy urges end to sanctions

DAMASCUS, Syria (AP)—In churches across long-stifled Syria, Christians marked the first Sunday services since the collapse of Bashar Assad 's government in an air of transformation. Some were in tears. Others clasped their hands in prayer.

"They are promising us that government will be formed soon and, God willing, things will become better because we got rid of the tyrant," said one worshiper, Jihad Raffoul, as the small Christian population hoped that new messages of inclusion would ring true.

"Today, our prayers are for a new page in Syria's future," said another, Suzan Barakat.

To help those efforts, the U.N. envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen, called for a quick end to Western sanctions as the rebel alliance that ousted Assad and sent him into exile in Russia a week ago considers the way forward.

Syria has been under deeply isolating sanctions by the United States, the European Union and others for years as a result of Assad's brutal response to what began as peaceful anti-government protests in 2011 and spiraled into civil war.

In another sign of yearning for normalcy, schools in Damascus reopened for the first time since Assad's ouster. At the Nahla Zaidan school in the Mezzah neighborhood, teachers hoisted the three-starred revolutionary flag.

"God willing, there will be more development, more security and more construction in this beloved country," said school director Maysoun Al-Ali.

But other challenges complicate rebuilding. The new leadership has not laid out a clear vision of how the country will be governed, and the main group behind the offensive remains designated as a terrorist organization by the U.S., which nevertheless has begun making direct contact.

Officials in Washington have indicated that the Biden administration is considering removing the terror designation from the group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS, which was once an al-Qaida affiliate.

The interim government is set to rule until March. Arab foreign ministers have called for U.N.-supervised elections based on a new constitution.

"We need to get the political process underway that is inclusive of all Syrians," Pedersen said. He also called for justice and accountability for crimes committed during the war, as some families continued to search for the tens of thousands of people that Assad's government placed in prisons and detention facilities.

An emergency meeting this weekend with foreign ministers from the U.S., Arab League and Turkey and top officials from the European Union and U.N. agreed the new government in Syria should prevent terror groups — like remnants of the Islamic State group—from taking hold and secure and destroy any remaining Assad-era chemical weapons.

The meeting also urged all parties to cease hostilities in Syria.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a video statement released Sunday that "we have no interest in conflict with Syria" and Israel's policy will follow "the emerging reality on the ground." He described Israeli military actions in the past week, including hundreds of airstrikes, as aimed at thwarting potential threats. Israel also has sent in ground troops, calling the incursion temporary but signaling the presence is open-ended.

For his part, HTS leader Ahmad al-Sharaa has said they don't intend to enter any conflict "because there is general exhaustion in Syria."

Israel's government also approved Netanyahu's plan to encourage population growth in the Golan Heights, which Qatar quickly called "a new episode in a series of Israeli aggressions on Syrian territories and a blatant violation of international law."

Israel captured the Golan Heights in the 1967 Mideast war and annexed it, though the international community except for the U.S. regards it as occupied. Israeli figures show the remote territory is home to about 50,000 people, about half of them Jewish Israelis and the other half Arab Druze, many of whom still consider themselves Syrians.

Canada's prime minister faces calls to resign

TORONTO (AP)—Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau faces growing pressure to resign from his own Liberal Party after his top minister abruptly quit and criticized his handling of the budget. Trudeau has led the country for nearly a decade, but has become widely unpopular in recent years over a wide range of issues, including the high cost of living and rising inflation.

There is no mechanism for Trudeau's party to force him out in the short-term. He could resign, or his party could be forced from power by a "no confidence" vote in Parliament that would trigger an election that would very likely favor the opposing Conservative Party.

If his party were to survive a vote in Parliament—which seems increasingly unlikely—Trudeau could choose to stay on as prime minister until there is an election.

As rising numbers of Liberal lawmakers called Tuesday for Trudeau to resign, the country's minister of natural resources, Jonathan Wilkinson, said "we all need to give him a little time to reflect."

Here's a deeper look at the possible paths for Trudeau and Canada.

If Trudeau resigns, which political analysts consider a likely scenario, the Liberals would need to choose an interim prime minister to lead the country at least until elections are held.

It isn't clear yet who the most likely candidate would be for any interim role.

Longer term, a person likely to seek power in the Liberal Party post-Trudeau is Mark Carney, the former head of the Bank of Canada, and later the Bank of England. Carney has long been interested in entering politics and becoming prime minister.

Another possible candidate is Trudeau's new finance minister, Dominic LeBlanc. The former public safety minister, and a close friend of Trudeau, LeBlanc recently joined the prime minister at a dinner with U.S. President-elect Donald Trump at Mar-a-Lago.

Concerns about Trudeau's leadership were exacerbated Monday when Chrystia Freeland, the former finance minister, quit his Cabinet. Freeland was highly critical of Trudeau's handling of the economy in the face of steep tariffs threatened by Trump. Shortly before Freeland announced her decision, the country's housing minister also quit.

"My guess is that if another minister or two goes, he's toast, he will be forced to resign," said Canadian historian Robert Bothwell.

With voters deeply unhappy, Parliament has the authority to try to knock Trudeau's Liberal party from power by holding a "no confidence" vote that would trigger an early election. And if a majority of Parliament votes against his government, Trudeau would then be "erased in the election," Bothwell said.

The walls are rapidly closing in on Trudeau.

Because Liberals don't hold an outright majority in the Parliament, they have for years depended on the support of the leftist New Democratic Party to pass legislation and stay in power. But that support has all but vanished — the NDP's leader has called on Trudeau to resign—and that clears the way for Parliament to vote "no confidence."

Life & Style

‘Emilia Pérez’ and ‘Wicked’ advance in Oscars shortlists

The Selena Gomez ballad “Mi Camino,” the Will Ferrell and Harper Steele road trip documentary “Will & Harper” and Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross’s pulsating “Challengers” score are one step closer to an Oscar nomination. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences unveiled shortlists in 10 categories Tuesday, including for documentary, international feature, best song and score.

Two musicals, “Emilia Pérez” and “Wicked,” were well represented in the categories. Netflix’s audacious transgender drug-lord drama “Emilia Pérez” was most named, advancing in international feature, original score, two original songs including “Mi Camino” and “El Mal” (performed by Zoe Saldaña), sound and hair and makeup.

“Wicked” also moved forward in several categories, like hair and makeup, original score, sound and visual effects. The adaptation of the Broadway musical did not include original songs and therefore wasn’t eligible in that category.

The song semifinalists include several notable artists, like Pharrell Williams for “Piece by Piece,” Lainey Wilson for her “Twisters” song “Out of Oklahoma,” Elton John and Brandi Carlile for “Never Too Late” and Robbie Williams for “Forbidden Road” from “Better Man.” Diane Warren may also be heading for a 16th nomination for her song from “The Six Triple Eight.” Nicholas Britell’s “Winter Coat,” performed by Saoirse Ronan in “Blitz,” was also included, as was Lin-Manuel Miranda’s “Tell Me It’s You” from “Mufasa: The Lion King,” performed by Aaron Pierre and Tiffany Boone.

AP

This image released by Netflix shows Karla Sofía Gascón, right, and Zoe Saldaña in a scene from “Emilia Pérez.”

Among the 15 documentaries eligible for nominations are “The Bibi Files,”“Daughters,” “Eno,” “Frida,”“The Remarkable Life of Ibelin,” “Dahomey,” “Union,” “Porcelain War” and “No Other Land.”

There are also 15 international features advancing, including “I’m Still Here” (Brazil), “Universal Language” (Canada), “The Seed of the Sacred Fig” (Germany), “Kneecap” (Ireland), “Vermiglio” (Italy), “Flow” (Latvia) and “Dahomey” (Senegal).

As most of the shortlists are in below-the-line categories celebrating crafts, there are also films that aren’t necessarily the most obvious of Oscar contenders. “Deadpool & Wolverine” was singled out for both sound and visual effects, as was “Alien: Romulus” which also got a nod for score.

“Dune: Part Two,” included in visual effects, sound and makeup and hair, was notably not among the 20 score finalists. Hans Zimmer’s work was not eligible because it contained too much preexisting music from the first “Dune.” He did make the cut for “Blitz,” however, as did Danny Elfman for “Beetlejuice Beetlejuice,” Kris Bowers for “The Wild Robot,” Bryce Dessner for “Sing Sing” and Daniel Blumberg for “The Brutalist.”

For the most part, shortlists are determined by members in their respective categories, though the specifics vary from branch to branch: Some have committees, some have minimum viewing requirements.

These lists will narrow to five when final nominations are announced on Jan. 17. The 97th Oscars, hosted by Conan O’Brien, will be held on Sunday, March 2, broadcasting on ABC and streaming live on Hulu. ***(AP)***

Megan Thee Stallion seeks restraining order, says imprisoned Tory Lanez continues to harass her

LOS ANGELES (AP)— Megan Thee Stallion asked a court on Tuesday to issue a restraining order against Tory Lanez, who she says is harassing her from prison through surrogates as he serves a 10-year sentence for shooting her in the feet.

The petition filed by the hip-hop star in Los Angeles Superior Court asks the judge to prevent the Canadian rapper Lanez, whose legal name is Daystar Peterson, from using third parties to continue the same online harassment of Megan, whose legal name is Megan Pete, that he engaged in and encouraged before his imprisonment.

“Even now, while behind bars, Mr. Peterson shows no signs of stopping,” the petition says. “Despite being sentenced to 10 years in prison for shooting Ms. Pete, Mr. Peterson continues to subject her to repeated trauma and revictimization.”

The petition says prison call logs from Lanez at the California Correctional Institution in Tehachapi show that he is coordinating attacks on Megan’s credibility.

An email seeking comment from Lanez’s lawyers was not immediately returned. A court hearing on the order is scheduled for Jan. 9.

The filing says bloggers acting on Lanez behalf continue to cast doubt on her allegations, making false claims including that the gun and bullet fragments in the case are missing.

The petition says the protective order issued to prevent the previous harassment is no longer in effect, which it calls a loophole and flaw in the criminal justice system.

In December 2022, Lanez was convicted of three felonies: assault with a semiautomatic firearm; having a loaded, unregistered firearm in a vehicle and discharging a firearm with gross negligence.

AP

This combo image shows Tory Lanez performing at the Festival d’ete de Quebec, July 11, 2018, in Quebec City, Canada, left, and Megan Thee Stallion at the premiere of “P-Valley,” June 2, 2022, in Los Angeles.

A judge rejected a motion for a new trial from Lanez’s lawyers, who are appealing his conviction.

In August of last year, he received the 10-year sentence, bringing what seemed to be a conclusion to a three-year legal and cultural saga that saw two careers, and lives, thrown into turmoil.

The petition says that one blogger in particular, Elizabeth Milagro Cooper, whom Megan is suing in a separate lawsuit, is acting as Lanez “puppet and mouthpiece.” She alleges Cooper is spreading falsehoods on social media and YouTube, saying in one video posted to X, “Can you even prove she was shot?” and calling her a “professional victim” in another post.

Ebbs and flows of friendships breed bitterness

DEAR ABBY: For the third time in my life, I am being shunned by long-term friends. Over the years, I have expended a great deal of time and effort to stay in touch with them. Back when we lived in the same places, we were very close. Ultimately, I moved away but always stayed in touch.

These friendships have spanned decades and, since we rarely see each other, I can’t understand what might have happened to precipitate this. I know everyone has issues, but they no longer respond, and I’m extremely hurt by it. It takes only seconds to acknowledge a text or email. Certainly, I’d be there for them in any way I could if they were having difficulties.

I’d like to tell them off, but I know it would resolve nothing, although it might be nice to get it off my chest. I’m finding it hard to let this go. What do you think I might do? It’s hard to believe they could be so callous.

LET DOWN IN FLORIDA

DEAR LET DOWN: Friendships don’t always last forever. Sometimes ties that bind people together start to fray. Geographical distance only adds to that. If I thought telling these people off would accomplish anything positive, I would say go ahead and do it, but it won’t. It would only justify the reason (if there even IS a reason) why they have moved on.

The healthiest thing you can do for yourself now is accept that what you had in the past no longer exists and concentrate on cultivating relationships closer to home with people who want to be friends with you.

■■■

DEAR ABBY: As a 70-year-old who devoted her nursing career to improving care for older adults, I know what good care looks like. I’ve seen it and provided it. Good care is when “what matters most” to patients drives the entire treatment plan. It’s age-friendly care that is informed by the medications we take, how easily we move, our mood and memory and our goals and preferences.

Unfortunately, we’re not getting good care as often as we should. A poll my organization conducted with Age Wave found that only 11% of older adults give the U.S. health care system a top grade. The survey also shows we value life in our years, not just years in our life. It highlights a disconnect between the care older adults want and what they receive. The gaps are most pronounced for people of color, women and those who live in rural areas.

Readers can learn about the care we want, deserve and can achieve at www.johnahartford.org/crossroads. It’s time to transform health care for older adults. I’m optimistic we can do it together.

TERRY FULMER, PRESIDENT, THE JOHN A. HARTFORD FOUNDATION

DEAR TERRY: Thank you for writing. I am impressed at how well-funded and prudently managed your organization seems to be.

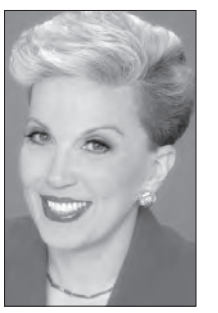
Readers, in 2023, this organization gave out $28 million in grants and another $2 million for research. Their grantees included a wide range of think tanks, advocacy groups, hospital systems and medical associations. If you are looking for an opportunity to get involved, visit the website Dr. Fulmer mentioned in her letter. If we want better care for older adults, we should all look into what it entails and how to see that we get it.

P.S. I am not affiliated with Dr. Fulmer’s organization, or any organization mentioned in my column.

■■■

To order “How to Write Letters for All Occasions,” send your name and mailing address, plus check or money order for $8 (U.S. funds) to: Dear Abby—Letter Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Shipping and handling are included in the price.)

DEAR ABBY
BY ABIGAIL VAN BUREN
UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

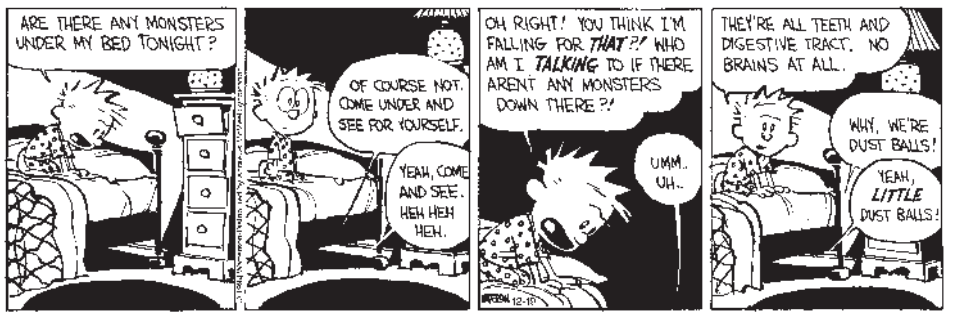


Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Contact Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

Pastimes

Calvin and Hobbes

By Bill Waterson


ARE THERE ANY MONSTERS UNDER MY BED TONIGHT?
OF COURSE NOT. COME UNDER AND SEE FOR YOURSELF.
YEAH, COME AND SEE. HEH HEH HEH.
OH RIGHT! YOU THINK I'M FALLING FOR THAT?! WHO AM I TALKING TO IF THERE AREN'T ANY MONSTERS DOWN THERE?!
UMM.. UH..
THEY'RE ALL TEETH AND DIGESTIVE TRACT. NO BRAINS AT ALL.
WHY, WE'RE DUST BALLS!
YEAH, LITTLE DUST BALLS!

Garfield®

By Jim Davis

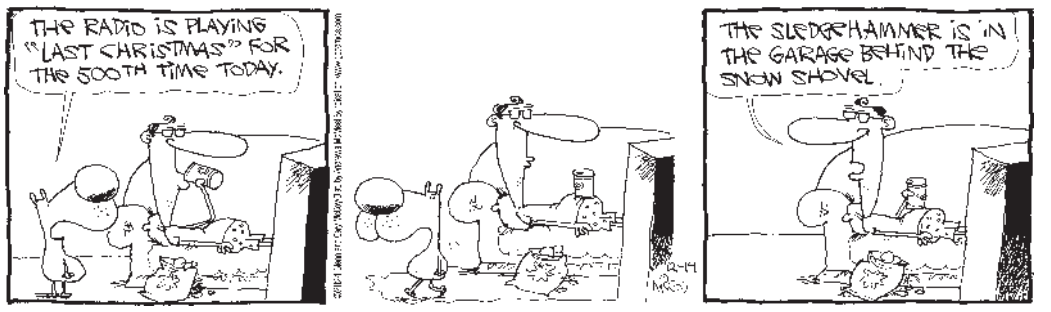
Adam@Home

By Bryan Basset

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
WAITING.
KATY, YOU CAN'T JUST SIT THERE FOR FIVE-AND-A-HALF DAYS.
WANNA PLAY BABY REINDEER?
I'LL GET YOU A MORE COMFORTABLE WAITING CUSHION.

The Duplex

By Glenn McCoy



CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

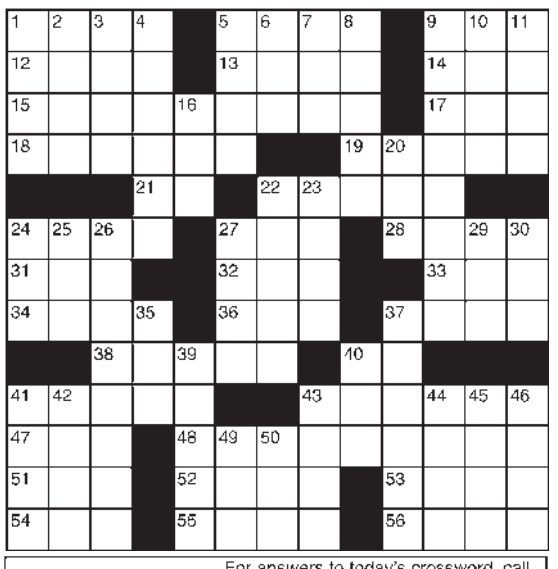
ACROSS
1 Ball-shaped cheese
5 School session
9 Catchall abbr.
12 Grown-up nits
13 A law — itself
14 Roth svgs. plan
15 Yuletide tree, typically
17 Tom Collins liquor
18 Comedian George
19 Sierra Nevada lake
21 "Carol — the Bells"
22 Nodded off
24 Latin 101 word
27 Casual shirt
28 Dessert fruit
31 Apprehend
32 Ms. Longoria
33 College URL ender
34 Throat clearer
36 Hamilton bill
37 Unforeseen problem
38 Critic, often
40 "Sideways" actress Sandra
41 — blitz
43 Start of a nursery rhyme
47 Hearty quaff
48 At neither extreme
51 British verb ending
52 Research sites
53 Old Italian money
54 Lair
55 Faction
56 Pack cargo

DOWN
1 Power co. supply
2 Prima donna
3 Computer brand
4 Red wine
5 Rotate
6 Chemical suffix
7 Hwy.
8 — Carlo
9 Number of holes on a course
10 Half a sextet
11 Walking stick
16 Computer image, briefly
20 iPhone download
22 Cut off
23 Be inclined
24 Literary collection
25 —-jongg
26 Scotland's "Granite City"
27 Head, to Henri
29 Nabokov novel
30 Bad hairpiece
35 Avril follower
37 Shoulder garments
39 Follows
40 Feedbag morsel
41 Hotel worker
42 Different
43 Optimum
44 "So —" ("Amen")
45 Prefix with dynamic
46 From the start
49 Scot's refusal
50 Telly network

Solution time: 24 mins.

E	L	L	A	■	E	N	S	■	A	M	P	S
R	O	O	D	■	Y	U	M	■	B	A	L	E
M	A	C	A	R	E	N	A	■	S	C	O	T
A	M	I	G	O	S	■	S	H	O	A	T	S
■	■	■	E	M	O	■	H	E	R	■	■	■
A	T	M	■	A	R	F	■	T	B	O	N	E
B	R	A	C	■	E	R	A	■	S	N	A	G
C	Y	C	L	E	■	A	N	D	■	I	T	O
■	■	■	B	A	L	M	■	A	R	E	■	■
H	O	O	P	L	A	■	R	E	G	A	L	E
I	D	O	S	■	M	A	C	G	Y	V	E	R
L	I	K	E	■	A	C	H	■	P	I	N	G
T	E	S	S	■	S	T	Y	■	T	A	C	S

Yesterday's answer 12-19



STUMPED? For answers to today's crossword, call **1-900-226-5955**! 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.

CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY: Marla Sokoloff, 44; Jake Gyllenhaal, 44; Alyssa Milano, 52; Tyson Beckford, 54.

Happy Birthday: Put your energy where it brings the highest return or is needed most this year, and you'll find your happy place in the universe. Opportunity is within reach if you don't give in to indecisiveness or procrastination. Refuse to let anyone talk you into the impossible when using common sense and putting a budget in place that you can live with will position you for success. Your numbers are 7, 13, 23, 28, 35, 41, 47.

ARIES *(March 21-April 19):* Refuse to let anyone take advantage of you or limit what you can achieve. Put on your runners, and don't stop until you reach your mark. You have what it takes to forge ahead, using your intelligence, insight and innovation to outshine any competition. Romance is on the rise. ✪✪✪✪

TAURUS *(April 20-May 20):* Take a close look around you, and you'll gain insight into the possibilities and pitfalls surrounding you. Take precautions around aggressive individuals or those who appear to be coming down with something contagious. A change of scenery will give you a different perspective regarding lifestyles and what's trending. ✪✪

GEMINI *(May 21-June 20):* A pick-me-up will brighten your day and lead to unexpected compliments. Take advantage of an opportunity to show off your talents and skills; someone with clout will take note and make an interesting suggestion or offer. Love is in the stars, and personal growth and gain are apparent. ✪✪✪✪

CANCER *(June 21-July 22):* Talk to an expert. The input you receive will shed some light on the possibilities and how to take advantage of them. A chance to partner with someone may be short-sighted. Question the cost of sharing or moving forward alone. The point is to have a positive impact. ✪✪✪

LEO *(July 23-Aug. 22):* There is power in being aggressive and following through with your plans. Take charge, and you'll make a lasting impression on someone who counts. A partnership or meaningful relationship looks promising. Make a move toward a commitment. Love and romance are on the rise. ✪✪✪

VIRGO *(Aug. 23-Sept. 22):* Keep life simple, your thoughts to yourself and your plans doable. How you present yourself to associates will determine how you are treated and if you'll excel. Getting others to trust and confide in you will pay off. Avoid letting someone you love take advantage of you. ✪✪✪

LIBRA *(Sept. 23-Oct. 22):* Show an interest in what others do, and you'll gain allies. An open dialogue will help you determine how best to designate your time and effort to have the most significant impact. An opportunity to travel or get together with someone who inspires you to improve will be valuable. ✪✪✪✪

SCORPIO *(Oct. 23-Nov. 21):* Take a moment before you respond. Someone will torment you if you let them. Concentrate on something you enjoy doing or helping someone you love. An emotional situation will develop if you put yourself in harm's way. Avoid situations that can lead to injury or illness. ✪✪

SAGITTARIUS *(Nov. 22-Dec. 21):* Think big, but don't exhaust your funds or energy trying to do the impossible. A reasonable approach to getting what you want will put your mind at ease and encourage you to build a solid base. Spending time with someone you love will be worth more than an expensive gift. ✪✪✪✪

EUGENIA LAST

THE LAST WORD IN ASTROLOGY

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CAPRICORN *(Dec. 22-Jan. 19):* Put more time into home improvements and preparation for upcoming events. You can surpass your expectations without going over budget if you pay attention to detail and maintain a positive attitude. Social and networking events will lead to unexpected benefits. Romance is in the stars. ✪✪✪

AQUARIUS *(Jan. 20-Feb. 18):* High energy and a positive attitude will position you for success. Discussing your plans with a superior will help you gain insight and establish what you want to pursue next. A fresh new look will give you the confidence you need to follow your heart and your dreams. ✪✪✪

PISCES *(Feb. 19-March 20):* Expressing yourself will leave you open to criticism. It is best to keep your thoughts to yourself and go about your business. Pay attention to the details, emphasize your skills and make a positive changes regarding how you live, handle money and earn your living. Take control and have no regrets. ✪✪✪

Birthday Baby: You are resourceful, outgoing and diverse. You are amicable and engaging.

✪: Avoid conflicts; work behind the scenes. ✪✪: You can accomplish, but don't rely on others. ✪✪✪: Focus and you'll reach your goals. ✪✪✪✪: Aim high; start new projects. ✪✪✪✪✪: Nothing can stop you; go for gold.

SUDOKU

Conceptis Sudoku *By Dave Green*

5			9		2			4
			5		3		9	7
	3				1	2	6	5
		1	8		4	5	7	
			2					
	8	9					3	
	9				8	6		
3				4	9		2	
	4							

Difficulty: ★★★ 12/19

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Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Saturday.

Yesterday's Answer

2	7	9	5	3	1	4	6	8
8	6	1	7	9	4	2	3	5
4	5	3	6	2	8	9	7	1
7	4	2	3	1	6	8	5	9
3	8	6	9	5	2	1	4	7
9	1	5	4	8	7	3	2	6
6	9	8	2	7	3	5	1	4
1	3	7	8	4	5	6	9	2
5	2	4	1	6	9	7	8	3

Difficulty: ★★★ 12/18

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WONDERWORD®

By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally and even backward. Find them, circle each letter of the word and strike it off the list. The leftover letters spell the **WONDERWORD.**

DRINKING DECOCTIONS Solution: 6 letters

T	R	O	S	E	P	B	O	U	I	L	L	O	N	W
F	C	A	F	L	U	I	D	S	A	G	E	N	O	T
S	E	A	A	T	S	E	R	O	F	L	O	O	S	A
T	L	N	R	D	L	E	M	O	N	I	D	O	A	E
T	T	I	N	T	D	A	B	R	L	O	N	R	E	H
R	E	I	O	E	X	E	C	E	W	B	E	E	S	S
A	R	L	U	R	L	E	D	I	E	G	L	G	E	A
D	N	A	R	M	A	N	L	S	N	V	B	A	I	M
I	O	B	I	E	A	N	E	I	I	A	D	N	R	G
T	M	R	S	D	D	P	G	T	M	M	T	O	R	N
I	A	E	H	I	I	D	A	E	U	O	M	O	E	I
O	N	H	U	C	R	M	I	L	K	L	M	E	B	T
N	N	Q	E	I	I	E	S	U	F	N	I	A	R	T
A	I	R	E	N	E	V	L	O	S	S	I	D	H	U
L	C	D	S	E	T	A	R	T	N	E	C	N	O	C

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Added, Berries, Blend, Boil, Botanical, Bouillon, Chamomile, Cinnamon, Concentrate, Cutting, Dandelion, Dilute, Dissolve, Dried, Extract, Fennel, Fluids, Forest, Ginger, Heat, Herbal, Infuse, Lemon, Liquid, Mash, Medicine, Milk, Nourish, Oils, Orange, Oregano, Plant, Recipe, Rinds, Rose, Sage, Season, Simmer, Teas, Traditional, Vitamins, Wood

Yesterday's Answer: Workshop

For **WONDERWORD** apps, books & more, visit Wonderword.com, or call 1-855-232-2367.

Bucks use 3-point barrage to beat Thunder for NBA Cup title

LAS VEGAS (AP)—Everyone has a lucky number in Las Vegas. For the Milwaukee Bucks, it was 3.

And the NBA Cup was their prize.

Tournament MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 26 points to go along with 19 rebounds and 10 assists, Damian Lillard added 23 points and the Bucks connected on 17 3-pointers on the way to beating the Oklahoma City Thunder 97-81 in the NBA Cup title game on Tuesday night.

"Everybody did their job," Lillard said. "We defended. We played well from the start of the game all the way through the finish. I think it just showed what we've been building. I think it all came out in our biggest game to this point."

Brook Lopez and Gary Trent Jr. each scored 13 for the Bucks, who joined the Los Angeles Lakers as the only champions of the 2-year-old event. A 19-5 Milwaukee run in the second half turned what was a five-point game into a 19-point game early in the fourth, and the Bucks kept control the rest of the way.

"It's great, it's great for our team," Antetokounmpo said. "We're getting better. ... We know we're leaving Vegas as a better team. I'm so proud of this group. Man, I'm so proud of this group."

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 21 and Jalen Williams added 18 for the Thunder, who had scored at least 99 points in every game this season. But they sputtered in plenty of ways Tuesday, getting outscored 51-15 from beyond the arc and shooting only 34%.

"We didn't shoot it well," Gilgeous-Alexander said. "But that's never an excuse. ... We've shot bad and won games before, so that's not an excuse."

Isaiah Hartenstein had 16 points and 12 rebounds for Oklahoma City, which was held to 31 points after halftime.

"We did some good things. We outscored them in the paint so obviously we did the job defensively on that end," Thunder coach Mark Daigneault said. "But obviously a tough night offensively all the way around for us. We didn't score nearly enough points, especially in the second half, to give ourselves a chance to win. But we can learn from it, move forward here."

It's a game that only counted for tournament purposes. There was about $300,000 in additional bonus money for Bucks players—they got $514,971 apiece, while the Thunder players got $205,988 each—but the win, the loss and the statistics from the game won't count toward the regular season.

Mired toward the bottom of the NBA after a 2-8 start, the Bucks have been on a tear since. This was their 13th win in their last 16 games, even though it won't be part of the official record.

No matter: When the Bucks emptied their bench with 1:37 left, Antetokounmpo pumped his fists like it was a true championship moment.

He's won bigger games—he and the Bucks captured the 2021 NBA title, after all. But they said from the outset of this tournament that the NBA Cup was a priority.

And they left no doubt in the end.

"We struggled coming out of the gates," Bucks coach Doc Rivers said. "No one here doubted what we can be and who we can be and we just hung in there. We stuck together and this is the byproduct of a team sticking together. But we still have work to do."

Antetokounmpo was even more succinct: "Job's not done," he said.

His point was clear: There's another title to chase in June. But this was still a trophy moment to celebrate.

Milwaukee played without guard Khris Middleton (non-COVID illness) and still improved to an NBA-best 12-1 in NBA Cup games, including a perfect 7-0 this season. The Bucks' only in-season tournament loss was to Indiana in last year's semifinals.

It was a rare night of playing uphill for Oklahoma City, which trailed by as many as 20. The Thunder trailed by more than 14 points in only two of their 25 games so far in the regular season—getting down by 30 against Golden State and by 21 to San Antonio.

No fewer than five players ended up on the floor, all scrapping for a loose ball with 9:12 left in the third quarter. Thunder forward Lu Dort was hit with a technical, Daigneault got another a few seconds later and Lillard ended up with a five-point possession—two free throws for the techs, followed by a 3-pointer.

The Thunder are 20-1 this season when leading after three quarters. They're now 0-5 when tied or trailing going into the final quarter (even though it will officially be 0-4 since this game won't be counted).

The Thunder visit Orlando on Thursday and Miami on Friday. The Bucks visit Cleveland on Friday and host Washington on Saturday.

AP

Milwaukee Bucks guard Damian Lillard (0) lifts up the NBA Cup while forward Giannis Antetokounmpo (34), left, and center Brook Lopez (11), right, celebrate after their team's victory in the championship game of the NBA Cup basketball tournament against the Oklahoma City Thunder Tuesday, Dec. 17, 2024, in Las Vegas.

As NBA rolls out new All-Star format, the stars taking a wait-and-see approach

LAS VEGAS (AP)—Milwaukee Bucks guard Damian Lillard is the reigning NBA All-Star Game MVP, after scoring 39 points last February in the highest-scoring game the league has ever seen.

East 211, West 186.

It rewrote the record book. It did not make the league happy.

So, the NBA is changing the how the midseason showcase works once again. The league has announced the finalized changes for the reimagined All-Star Game, turning it into a one-night tournament—the Sunday night of All-Star weekend—and following the format that the Rising Stars Challenge for rookies and second-year players has used in recent years.

The NBA's hope is simply this: By getting players to compete even a little bit more, the product will be more compelling, and more people will watch. Ratings have plummeted in recent years, viewers evidently not loving the constant stream of lobs, 3-pointers, dunks and zero defense.

"I understand what's being attempted," Lillard said. "You want to create some type of competitiveness in that game on Sunday. You want to try to mix it up to try to find a way to make it more entertaining. We'll see."

The new format largely mirrors the one used for the Rising Stars games since 2022. For Rising Stars, the NBA brings the best rookies and sophomores to All-Star weekend and splits them into four teams. There are two semifinal games—the first team to 50 points was the winner in Year 1, the first team to 40 points has been the winner of the semifinals in 2023 and 2024. And the semifinal winners meet in a championship game that same night, first to 25 points winning.

The All-Star format this year will see 24 players being selected — 10 will be designated as starters, 14 as reserves, even though that's not how it will work on game night. The 24 players will be drafted into three teams of eight, and the Rising Stars winning team will remain to compete as the fourth team in the All-Star tournament. There will be two semifinal games to 40 points, and then a final to 40 points.

"If I get a chance to go, obviously it's a blessing," Oklahoma City star Shai Gilgeous-Alexander said. "I support whatever they do because it's an honor to be there."

Improving the All-Star product has been a priority of Commissioner Adam Silver and the league office for some time. Nobody is expecting a Game 7, playoff-type level of competitiveness. Nobody is hoping to see something akin of Pete Rose running over Ray Fosse at home plate in the 1970 Major League Baseball All-Star Game.

What the league wants, yet again, is just a little more competition. The league tried it with a target-score ending for a few years, tried it with captains picking their own teams, and now will try the tournament.

"We're looking at other formats," Silver said on Nov. 2, which was his way of announcing that changes were coming without formally announcing that changes were coming. "I think there's no doubt that the players were disappointed as well in last year's All-Star Game. We all want to do a better job providing competition and entertainment for our fans."

This year's All-Star weekend is Feb. 14-16 in San Francisco. The rookie-sophomore event headlines the Friday night lineup, followed by All-Star Saturday—the dunk contest, the 3-point contest, the skills competition and almost certainly another version of last year's Stephen Curry vs. Sabrina Ionescu shootout event between NBA and WNBA stars, those two quite possibly set to be joined this year by Klay Thompson and Caitlin Clark.

And then on Sunday, it's the All-Star Game—or this year, the games. There won't be 397 points scored this year, for certain.

"I'm definitely more a fan of the originality," Lillard said Monday, the eve of the NBA Cup final that he and the Bucks are playing in Las Vegas against the Thunder. "I think being able to play on Sunday is a special thing. The top players get to do it. Not everybody has that experience.

"One side of me is like, why? Why change it? But I think just like this NBA Cup, there's some incentive in there for people to get after it earlier in the season and try to get something done," Lillard added. "So, I think that's a possible route for that, as well. We'll see. I know they switched it up a little bit this year, and we'll see how it goes."

MLB study: Velocity, max efforts likely causing pitching injuries

NEW YORK (AP) — A yearlong study by Major League Baseball concluded rising velocities, pitch shaping and emphasis on maximum effort are the likely causes of the vast increase in pitcher injuries and recommended exploring rules changes to address the problem.

The 62-page report released Tuesday said the trends extended to high school and youth baseball because of the incentive to get noticed by professional scouts. The study said there is no evidence linking the pitch clock to injuries.

Illustrated with 26 tables of data, the report was based on

» Rule changes should be considered

interviews with more than 200 people that included former players, front office executives, orthopedic surgeons, athletic trainers, physical therapists, biochemists, major league, college and independent coaches, and international trainers.

"This is a landmark event," said Glenn Fleisig, director of biomechanics research at the American Sports Medicine Institute in Birmingham, Alabama, who participated in the study. "This is a very important first step, which is to identify the problem and identify the likely risk factors. I am pleased that there was such a consensus. ... The next step is to do various types of research studies."

Possible areas to be studied include offseason training and early season workload, non-game activity, defining and measuring fatigue, biomechanics and pitching style, obtaining more data from international leagues and differentiating results from domestic and international signings.

AP

San Diego Padres starting pitcher Joe Musgrove exits the game during the fourth inning in Game 2 of an NL Wild Card Series baseball game against the Atlanta Braves, Wednesday, Oct. 2, 2024, in San Diego.

Major league pitcher IL placements increased from 212 in 2005 to 485 this year and days on the IL rose from 13,666 to 32,257.

"The most significant causes are likely the increased velocity of pitches, the emphasis on optimizing 'stuff' (a term referencing the composite movement characteristics of pitches, including horizontal and vertical break and spin rate), and the modern pitcher's focus on exerting maximum effort while pitching in both game and non-game situations," the report said.

"Some experts speculated on the potential influence of other factors on the short-term increase in injuries over the past several years, including the lasting effect of COVID-impacted seasons, the introduction of the pitch clock and perceived inconsistencies in the surface grip of the baseball. There was not sufficient consensus or evidence to establish a link between these other factors and pitcher injuries."

The report said experts recommend MLB consider rules changes to "increase the value of pitcher health and durability and decrease the value of short-duration, max-effort pitching."

"For instance, playing rules could be adjusted or designed to encourage or require starting pitchers to preserve enough energy to allow them to pitch deeper into games," the report said. "These incentives could be supported by roster rules that more appropriately regulate the availability of pitchers on a roster or in a team's bullpen for a given game, including potential changes to the number and frequency of transactions that allow clubs to replace pitchers on their rosters."

MLB experimented in the Atlantic League with a double-hook designated hitter from 2021-13, in which a team lost its DH if its starting pitcher didn't finish at least five innings in the last two seasons. MLB lowered the maximum on pitchers from 14 to 13 on June 20, 2022, though it is 14 from Sept. 1 on after rosters expand from 26 to 28. The minimum pitcher IL was restored to 15 days in 2022 after dropping to 10 for the previous five years.

Factors in injuries may include use of weighted balls in training, increased intensity of bullpen sessions, a possible decline in cardiovascular and endurance training, and workload management that incentivizes harder effort over shorter spans.

"Multiple medical experts described new injury patterns that they believe are tied to the focus on velocity and max-effort pitching," the report said, listing latissimus and teres major tears, rib fractures and oblique strains.

Among the data points:

1. Tommy John surgeries for major and minor league players increased from 104 in 2010 to a peak of 314 in 2020 and declined to 281 this year. Among those this year, 41 were in the major leagues or on minor league rehab assignments and 240 were with minor league clubs.

2. Since 2008, average mph velocity in the major leagues has risen from 91.3 to 94.2 for four-seam fastballs, 82.8 to 84.6 for sliders, 75.7 to 79.5 for curveballs and 81.7 to 85.5 for changeups. During that period, fastball usage declined from 60% to 48%. By comparison, fastball velocity in Nippon Professional Baseball was 91.1 this year.

3. IL days for pitcher elbow injuries rose from 3,940 in 2005 to 12,185 this year and for shoulder injuries increased from from 2,634 to 5,445.

4. IL placements from spring training through opening day rose from 61 in 2017 to 112 this year and from day two through the end of the regular season from 303 to 352.

5. Starts of five or more innings dropped from 84% to 70% in the majors from 2005-25 and from 68.9% to 36.8 in the minors.

6. Thirty-five players selected in the top 10 rounds of this year's amateur draft had Tommy John surgery, up from four in 2005.

7. Prospects who threw 95 mph or higher at the Perfect Game National Showcase increased from three in 2018 to 36 this year.

8. UCL surgeries among youth and high school pitchers at the Andrews Sports Medicine & Orthopedic Center rose from 10% of all UCL surgeries in 1995 to 52% in 2021 before dropping to 42% in 2023.

9. Pitchers per team during the season averaged 15.1 in 1980, rose to 34.4 in 2021 and declined to 32.5 this year.

10. International players had more UCL surgeries than domestic counterparts in 2023 for the first time since 2010.

11. Average innings over the previous season for college starting pitchers selected in the first three rounds of the amateur draft dropped from 101 1/3 in 2012 to 74 this year.

12. Pitchers selected in the first three rounds of the draft fell from 73.3% in 2014 to 41.7% this year.

Yankees acquire outfielder Cody Bellinger from Cubs for pitcher Cody Poteet

NEW YORK (AP)— Outfielder Cody Bellinger was acquired by the New York Yankees from the Chicago Cubs on Tuesday for right-hander Cody Poteet.

Chicago will send the Yankees $5 million as part of the trade.

The 29-year-old Bellinger, whose father Clay helped the Yankees win World Series titles in 1999 and 2000, could play center field next year as Aaron Judge returns to right following the departure of Juan Soto to the Mets. Bellinger also can play first base, a position that opened when Anthony Rizzo became a free agent.

Bellinger is owed $27.5 million in 2025 under the first of two player options as part of an $80 million, three-year contract. The two-time All-Star also has a $25 million player option for 2026 with a $5 million buyout that would be payable in equal installments on Jan. 15, 2026, and Jan. 15, 2027.

Bellinger batted .266 with 18 homers and 78 RBIs in 130 games this year. He was on the injured list from April 24 to May 7 with a broken right rib.

He drove in 33 runs in his last 39 games of the season, but Chicago finished with an 83-79 record.

Bellinger made his major league debut in 2017 and spent his first six seasons with the Los Angeles Dodgers. He was the NL MVP in 2019, batting .305 with 47 homers and 115 RBIs in 156 games. He also helped LA win the World Series in 2020.

He was cut by the Dodgers in November 2022 and signed a $17.5 million, one-year deal with Chicago a month later. He regained his form with the Cubs, hitting a career-best .307 with 26 homers, 97 RBIs and 20 steals in 130 games last season year.

Bellinger is a .259 hitter with 196 homers and 597 RBIs in 1,005 games. He turns 30 in July.

Poteet, 30, made his major league debut with Miami in 2021, had Tommy John surgery on Aug. 17, 2022, returned to the mound with Kansas City's Triple-A Omaha farm team on Sept. 23, 2023, was released by the Royals and signed with the Yankees last January. He went 3-0 with a 2.22 ERA in four starts and one relief appearance during a season in which he was sidelined between June 12 and Sept. 25 by a strained right triceps.

Mets sign Jared Young to a 1-year deal, adding depth at first base

NEW YORK (AP)—The New York Mets signed infielder Jared Young to a one-year contract Monday, adding depth at first base after star slugger Pete Alonso became a free agent this fall.

Young gets a $1.15 million salary while in the major leagues and a $425,000 salary while in the minors.

He is a .210 career hitter with two homers, eight RBIs and a .725 OPS in 22 major league games and 69 plate appearances with the Chicago Cubs from 2022-23.

He was claimed off waivers by St. Louis in November 2023 and batted .285 with 11 homers and a .917 OPS at Triple-A Memphis this year before getting released by the Cardinals in July.

Young then played 38 games for the Doosan Bears in Korea, hitting .326 with 10 homers, 39 RBIs and a 1.080 OPS.

A left-handed hitter, the 29-year-old Young was born in Canada and selected by the Cubs in the 15th round of the 2017 amateur draft out of Old Dominion in Virginia.

All 12 of his big league starts have come at first base. He has played every position in the minors besides catcher and center field.

MVA partners with RUNABLE to promote Saipan Marathon 2025

The Marianas Visitors Authority has struck a strategic memorandum of understanding with RUNABLE Co., Ltd., a leading running platform in South Korea to actively promote Saipan Marathon 2025 by introducing creative marathon-themed tour products that combine running and tourism.

Through this partnership, the MVA will highlight to Korean runners the charm and natural beauty of The Marianas, located just 4.5-hour flying time from Seoul. The initiative will position The Marianas as a premier running destination by leveraging collaborative efforts and unique offerings centered on Saipan Marathon scheduled for March 8, 2025.

An official signing ceremony was held on Dec. 11, 2024, at RUNABLE headquarters in Seoul.

"This agreement provides an exceptional opportunity to blend Korea's rapidly growing running culture with The Marianas' stunning natural beauty, sports-ready infrastructure, and vibrant local culture," said MVA managing director Christopher A. Concepcion. "By collaborating with RUNABLE, we aim to position the Saipan Marathon as a must-attend sport event for Korean runners, delivering an unforgettable running experience in a tropical paradise."

MVA

Marianas Visitors Authority managing director Christopher A. Concepcion, left, and RUNABLE CEO Young-ho Ryu sign an MOU on Dec. 11, 2024, to promote the Saipan Marathon scheduled March 8, 2025.

MVA

The partnership is expected to attract the attention of Korean runners through various promotions, including joint marketing and collaborations between Saipan Marathon and the JTBC Seoul Marathon, one of Korea's largest marathons, hosted by RUNABLE.

A signing ceremony was also attended by Young-ho Ryu, CEO of RUNABLE. During the MOU ceremony, executives shared their vision for collaboration and outlined actionable strategies for success.

"We are thrilled to partner with the MVA to offer runners an unparalleled chance to explore the beauty and charm of The Marianas," said Ryu. "Through this collaboration, we will continue to support the global running community by creating innovative content that integrates running with tourism and adventure. RUNABLE's association with the JTBC Seoul Marathon, one of the largest marathons in South Korea with over 40,000 runners this year, will prove beneficial for our event organizers and participants."

To engage participants in advance, a "virtual run" themed around a Saipan getaway will reward runners for completing designated missions. Additionally, Saipan Marathon-inspired run-trip tour products will launch on the RUNABLE app this month, providing a blend of fitness and adventure.

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An annual signature event of the MVA and organized in cooperation with Northern Marianas Athletics, Saipan is a certified measured course by World Athletics in cooperation with AIMS (Association of International Marathons and Distance Races). Registration is open at https://raceroster.com/events/2025/92790/saipan-marathon-2025.

For more information, visit https://raceroster.com or contact MVA Community Projects coordinator Ed Diaz at (670) 664-3210 or communityprojects@mymarianas.com. ***(PR)***

KANOA

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matched and were unable to penetrate each other's defenses. They played the pitch from end to end with no result until the 35th minute when Elikristiana Iglecias found the back of the net to open the game up.

MPU tried to regroup and get something going as the clock winded down, but couldn't find an opening. Kanoa then quickly doubled their advantage in the 44th from a goal by Aubrey White.

From there, Kanoa established their dominance from another goal by White in the 56th, and wrapped it up with their fourth and final goal just two minutes later.

Aside from Iglecias and White, Kanoa's U17 girls team was also made up of Faith Arriola, Joselynn Atalig, Cali Jade Cabrera, Julie Chavez, Beatrice Gross, Ye Lynn He, Rhiana Macalinao, Miley Mafnas, Alejandra Manabat, Hayven Moteisou, Phynix Nogis, and Quiara Sanchez.

The Golden Boot Award went once again to Kanoa's ball magnet—Beatrice Gross—who was the awardee in the U14 division, and Ye Lynn Ha who both had 17 goals each.

Third place went to Paire Football Club after Shirley's FC forfeited the match.

In the boys division, Kanoa also beat their foe MPU in a close matchup. 2-1.

Both teams clashed with an aggressive start to the finals and Kanoa gained the upper hand early with a goal by Paul Lizama just six minutes in.

A long drawn-out battle ensued with neither team being able to break through the keepers' fortifications. The first half came and went with still a 1-0 Kanoa lead until Lizama broke the silence with another goal to put them up, 2-0.

When it seemed as though MPU was unable to get on board, Casey Chambers slotted one in the back end of the game to make it 1-2. However, that was all MPU wrote as they failed to tie it up and handed the championships to Kanoa once again.

The Golden Boot Award was shared in this division too, this time between Matansa's Jayvin Bisek of Matansa Football Club and Kanoa's Paul Lizama with 13 goals each.

Kanoa's U17 boys team consisted of Zuriel Abejo, Damien Concepcion, Donehvyn Fejeran, Rooney Gil, Izeah Jolo, Paul Lizama, Yuxi Lu, Adrian Lubao, Ronald Manabat, Akoni Matsumoto, Christian Negara, Tyler Omelau, John Quidato, Taher Shakir, Arstin Tagabuel, Jayson Tagabuel, Maximus Taitano, Eamon Tang, Aiden Wesley, and David Xing.

Third place was Matansa FC which overpowered the Women's Development Team, 7-0.

HILITAIS

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After a timeout however, FMS regrouped and landed back-to-back points from serves to get within one, 16-17. HMS answered and went up, 18-16, but FMS landed well placed returns to tie it all up, 18-18.

From there however, HMS thrived in their serves and left FMS rooted—unable to retaliate with proper returns. HMS then cruised to a 21-19 first set win.

The second set was even more intense though, with the Napu Riders refusing to drown. It was a back-and-forth matchup, with neither team truly having the upper hand. The set could've gone either way throughout as FMS tried to force a tie-breaker.

But the Hilitais' rotation of Franchesca Ferrer, Jayla Ayuyu, Elyza Brillo, Elissa Calayag, Augyguel Castro, Geana Chargualaf, Alina Esakova, Tehani Jolo, Seraya Kaniki, Neisha Kukkun, Hennewe Phillip, Dorcia Santos, Elena Teigita, and Doreane Tudela held on to secure the game in extra points, 22-20.

Meanwhile, HMS II has three wins and one loss after their game against FMS II. HMS II's roster of Louise Achas, Gulianna Acupan, Rhima Alfonso, Anica Aquino, Shalom Batinggal, Angel Calayag, Seraya Kaniki, Tiancy Kapwich, Empress Lopez, Keziah Mallari, Cina Martino, Hayven Moteisou, Juana Nocos, and Lailey Teregeyo brought down FMS II, 21-14, 21-19.

In other results that day, Dandan Middle School II triumphed over Chacha Ocean View Middle School II, 22-21, 21-10; and DMS overpowered COVMS, 21-18, 21-11.

GUAM

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good fair experience for the surfers, but also for the audience to be able to enjoy an event all in one day where a winner would be declared. We know people's time is valuable and having a one-day event is the best option. We look to try and improve every year so look out for the next event."

About this year's winners, he said, "Guam sent their best surfers and it was an honor to have them compete against CNMI's best. BJ Rolinski is a decorated surfer from Guam in prone and drop knee. John Barber is also a decorated surfer from Guam that competes and surfs internationally. All the surfers from Guam are very humble, friendly, and were so excited to be here. We cannot thank them enough. "

As for CNMI surfers, he said, "Our CNMI surfers also did very well against Guam's best. Herman Guerrero and Shuji Takanobu made the finals in their respective divisions and we're so proud of all our local surfers that we can match up with the Marianas' best surfers."

He then said, "We want to thank the CNMI for welcoming our guests and to continue to share the Hafa Adai spirit and by supporting the event. Thank you to DPS Marine Patrol and DFEMS for watching over our surfers and our community. We also want to thank our volunteers."

To the sponsors, Manibusan said, "*Un dankulo na Si Yu'us Ma'åse.*" The sponsors are MARPAC, Kona Brewing, Ghost Energy, Allied Pacific Environmental Consulting (APEC), Atkins Kroll, ITE, Boarderline, All Star Sporting Goods, Athletes Foot, Roil Soil, Saipan Surf Company, Local Bones, Salty Skin, Caravan of Food, Mariana Arts, Lotus Surf Shop, SOIS, Pualani Crowns, Saipan Mayor's Office, Marianas Visitors Authority, Sky Dive Saipan, Fish Guyz Scuba, J's Restaurant, Rep. Joel Camacho (Ind-Saipan), Rep. Roy Ada (R-Saipan), Donald Mendiola, DLNR Parks & Recreation, and the Guahan Bodyboarders Inc.

TRIBUNE SPORTS SCORES

NBA STANDINGS

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Atlantic Division	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	21	5	.808	–
New York	16	10	.615	5
Brooklyn	10	16	.385	11
Philadelphia	8	16	.333	12
Toronto	7	20	.259	14½
Southeast Division				
Orlando	17	11	.607	–
Miami	13	11	.542	2
Atlanta	14	13	.519	2½
Charlotte	7	19	.269	9
Washington	3	21	.125	12
Central Division				
Cleveland	23	4	.852	–
Milwaukee	14	11	.560	8
Indiana	12	15	.444	11
Chicago	12	15	.444	11
Detroit	11	16	.407	12

WESTERN CONFERENCE

Southwest Division	W	L	Pct	GB
Memphis	18	9	.667	–
Houston	17	9	.654	½
Dallas	17	9	.654	½
San Antonio	13	13	.500	4½
New Orleans	5	22	.185	13
Northwest Division				
Oklahoma City	20	5	.800	–
Denver	14	10	.583	5½
Minnesota	14	11	.560	6
Portland	8	18	.308	12½
Utah	5	20	.200	15
Pacific Division				
Phoenix	14	11	.560	–
Golden State	14	11	.560	–
L.A. Clippers	15	12	.556	–
L.A. Lakers	14	12	.538	½
Sacramento	13	14	.481	2

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Bucks use 3-point barrage to beat Thunder for NBA Cup title

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NMIFA

Champions of the U17 boys division, Kanoa Football Club, pose for a group photo during the awards ceremony of the TakeCare Youth Soccer League Fall 2024 last Saturday at the NMI Soccer Training Center in Koblerville.

NMIFA

Champions of the U17 girls division, Kanoa Football Club, pose for a group photo during the awards ceremony of the TakeCare Youth Soccer League Fall 2024 last Saturday at the NMI Soccer Training Center in Koblerville.

Kanoa teams superior again in U17 finals

By LEIGH GASES
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REPORTER

Kanoa Football Club's two U17 teams are the top dogs once again in the TakeCare Youth Soccer League Fall as they clinched the 2024 titles last Saturday at the NMI Soccer Training Center in Koblerville.

NMIFA

U17 girls Golden Boot Award winners Kanoa Football Club players Beatrice Gross, left, and Ye Lynn Ha, pose with the trophy during the awards ceremony of the TakeCare Youth Soccer League Fall 2024 last Saturday at the NMI Soccer Training Center in Koblerville.

NMIFA

U17 boys division Golden Boot awardees, Paul Lizama of Kanoa Football Club, left, and Matansa's Jayvin Bisek, pose with the trophy during the awards ceremony of the TakeCare Youth Soccer League Fall 2024 last Saturday at the NMI Soccer Training Center in Koblerville.

Both teams were champions in the TakeCare Youth Soccer League Fall Spring 2024 season and it was the same old story this season.

Majority of the girls' team were part of the U14 championship team and carried their winning ways into the older division as they blanked MP United FC, 4-0.

It was a quiet first half as both teams were evenly

See KANOA on Page 15

Hilitais sinks Napu Riders in girls v-ball

By LEIGH GASES
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REPORTER

Both of Hopwood Middle School's teams dashed the hopes of a victory for Francisco M. Sablan Middle School's teams, defeating both in two sets each during the continuation of the NMIVA-PSS Interscholastic Girls Middle School Volleyball League 2024-2025 last Tuesday at the Marianas High School Gymnasium.

The Hilitais' varsity team won over the Napu Riders' varsity team in two sets for their third win of the season.

They returned well prepared this time around after their previous loss to Mount Carmel School, but the Napu Riders did not make it easy for them. The Napu Riders kept pace with the Hilitais until they hit a snag from errors on their returns and HMS led, 17-14 in the first set.

LEIGH GASES

Hopwood Middle School varsity's Jayla Ayuyu goes for an overhead serve during their game against Francisco M. Sablan Middle School's varsity in the NMIVA-PSS Interscholastic Girls Middle School Volleyball League 2024-2025 last Tuesday at the Marianas High School Gymnasium.

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Guam surfers boogie to 1st place in Obyan

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Guam and CNMI participants of the 3rd Annual Boogie Down at Obyan 2024 pose for a group photo on a full day of sports on land and on water.

By LEIGH GASES
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REPORTER

The 3rd Annual Boogie Down at Obyan 2024 brought a total of 24 surfers together—13 from the CNMI and 11 from Guam—just as the islands are connected by the ocean that surrounds them.

Guam surfers John Barber and B.J. Rolinski were not on their turf, but still boogied to first place in their respective divisions as the waves showed off on a bustling Saturday on Saipan.

Barber was one with the waves in the open division and scored the highest total points of 16.83 in the finals to crash into first place. Second was Carl Dela Cruz with a total of 15.06, third went to Rolinski at 12.23. Fourth was Herman Guerrero with 11.67 points.

In the drop knee division, Rolinski clinched first place with 15.34 points; Jonathan Leon Guerrero was second at 14.77; Dela Cruz came in third at 14.23, and Shuji Takanobu bagged fourth place at 13 points flat.

The open division featured surfers in the prone position to score points, while drop knee surfers must have one knee on the board surface to score.

Barber said of the competition, "Overall I thought this competition was awesome. Good waves and good vibes all around!"

On his win, he said, "Overall I feel blessed. While there is a lot of skill and strategy involved in competitive surfing at the end of the day nature delivers the waves. It wasn't super consistent throughout the day so I was thankful I found the right waves to get me to the final."

He said his go-to trick and strategy was to put up some combos and barrels if available. "I was able to pull a few rollos and spinners throughout the first rounds. In the finals, I managed to complete an ARS (air roll spin) which got me a high score and made it out of a smaller but longer barrel."

He then gave thanks and said, "First off, I want to thank God for blessing us with waves and keeping us safe in the water. Also big thanks to the Marianas surf community for putting on this event. Also, to all the Saipan crew who have always been welcoming and happy to share waves thank you. The hospitality and vibes have always been amazing every time I have come to Saipan."

For Ed Manibusan Jr., Marianas Surf Skate League chairman, he said that they changed the event from a two-day event to one day because they are always looking for ways to improve the event.

"We felt that having one day was always the goal but we wanted to make sure that we could do it effectively where we would provide a

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